



FERDINAND DE LESSEPS IN 1869
(By courtesy of the Suez Canal Company)

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FERDINAND DE LESSEPS

BY

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Richard Burton : Explorer

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*Dedicated to
Anglo-French Amity,
which
Ferdinand De Lesseps
Strove so Steadfastly
to Promote*

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FOREWORD

BLESSED are the Peacemakers! That is perhaps the reflection that comes uppermost in one's mind when considering the life and work of that great soul Ferdinand de Lesseps. He was a Frenchman; and it is a signal honour to France that she produced such a son. But De Lesseps was not only a Frenchman, he was a world citizen. His whole career was devoted to the service of humanity. In these days of narrow nationalism and party allegiances it is good to think on such a man.

It has been a pleasure to write this biography, not only because its subject is a person whom one can admire unrestrainedly, but because to see for awhile with his vision is to recapture something of one's youthful idealism and to have one's hope in humanity restored. While men of his type are born into the world we need have no fears for civilisation.

The life of Ferdinand de Lesseps was full, active and useful. He was a practical man of affairs as well as a dreamer. There was nothing of the ascetic about him: he was gay, witty, and charming, enjoying the good things, both a sportsman and a cavalier. He loved his home and his children. He radiated sympathy and helpfulness, so that people of all conditions turned to him naturally in trouble. Adventure was the spice of life to him, and he could never complain of the lack of it. One would not for a moment present him as faultless: his deficiencies were plain and, indeed, to incorrigibly adult minds distinctly irritating, for here was a

grown man who flaunted childhood's winsomeness and inconsequence before their offended eyes. Whenever he was told No, he always responded with a bland Why? He was cocky and cocksure, and in the end, like many another venturesome cherub, he was caught in the scaly toils of the nasty dragon.

The dramatist would think of the life of De Lesseps as a classic Tragedy in three acts. I have turned those acts into three books and confined myself to a plain and straightforward narrative; but I have not been unaware of the dramatic possibilities even when I have not developed them, and perhaps it will give readers additional interest to enlarge upon them in their own imaginations. I have been more concerned to bring out the philanthropic aspects of this life, using that word in its literal sense. I have also, as this is an English biography, stressed the connections of Ferdinand de Lesseps with Great Britain more than has been done by the French writers. To the best of my knowledge there has been no adequate life of De Lesseps in English, and in view of the present state of world affairs and the Mediterranean question I believe the subject to be both timely and topical.

I am indebted to a great many printed sources for my information, most of which are acknowledged in the bibliography at the end of the book. In my translations from the French I hope that I have not made any serious blunders, and that I have conveyed something of the spirit of the original. I am particularly grateful to the Suez Canal Company for assisting me with material, and for their kindness in loaning me plates.

HUGH J. SCHONFIELD.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE VALUE OF TRADITION

ON the battlements of one of those frontier fortresses that once crowned the rugged heights of the Pyrenees the vigilant captain might often be seen pacing to and fro. This was at the end of the fourteenth century. The captain was a Basque, though some say that he had Scottish blood in his veins. His name, so Froissart the historian tells us, was L'Essep, ancestor of the great man whose biography is the subject of this book.

Ever since that time, more than half a millennium ago, the Lesseps family, resident at the nearby seaport of Bayonne, can point to an honourable record of public service. From the beginning they were frontier folk, and that heritage may in large measure be responsible for their peculiar qualifications for representing their country abroad. Foreign affairs was indeed their metier. The Peace of the Pyrenees in 1659 did more than secure to Louis XIV the integrity of his kingdom, it secured to him also the devotion of these trusty Pyrenean subjects. Under those notable ministers of the Grand Monarch, Mazarin, Lionne, and Fleury, the Lesseps were tutored in the arts of diplomacy, and they were apt pupils. But in the more delicate atmosphere of statecraft they never lost the honesty, simplicity and vigour of their native high-

lands swept by the Atlantic winds. They were bluff, hearty men incapable of petty intrigue. And this, while it enabled them to weather great constitutional changes, sometimes made them the victims of administrative politics.

Characteristic of the family was Dominique de Lesseps, ennobled by Louis XVI in reward for faithful service in the department of Foreign Affairs. His patriotism and sincerity secured for him in old age membership of the Constituent Assembly. He came unscathed through the Terror, refusing to fly the country that he loved, and survived to see the more settled conditions under the Convention.

In the next generation there were the brothers Mathieu and Barthélemy de Lesseps ready to enter upon what seemed to have become the family career. They were fortunate in their age. The conquests of Napoleon were extending the sphere of French influence not only to the farthest limits of Europe, but also into Africa and Asia.

Barthélémy had been the sole survivor of La Pérouse's fatal expedition which had reached the utmost confines of Asia. When that indomitable navigator decided to send one of his party overland with messages to Versailles his choice fell on De Lesseps, who had impressed him with his sterling qualities, and who was well acquainted with the Russian language. Barthélémy left Kamchatka in 1787, and trekked with a dog team across the icy wastes of Siberia, reaching his destination eventually after an amazing journey of eighteen hundred leagues. Louis XVI received him on his arrival and listened eagerly to his strange story.

He was presented at Court in the guise of a Kamchatkan huntsman, and became the hero of the hour. Later he published an account of his experiences together with a lexicon of the Kamchatkan tongue. It afterwards transpired that the terrible journey had been the means of saving his life; for had he remained with his leader he would undoubtedly have perished when La Pérouse's two ships were lost with all hands.

After the French Revolution Barthélemy was appointed Consul General in Russia, and at the time of Napoleon's disastrous campaign he was made District Governor. He was inclined to refuse the post, pleading incompetence. "Your Majesty will be badly served," he said. "It is a wretched district, and I should make an even worse administrator." But the Emperor was concerned to re-establish order, and knew that he had the right man. "What you say of the district," he had replied, "is no doubt correct; but nothing could be less true of the administrator." Despite his misgivings, Barthélemy carried out his duties so admirably that he received special commendation in the twenty-second despatch of the Grand Army. Nevertheless Russia was to prove as fatal for him as for the sovereign he served: he lost everything in the Great Retreat and that terrible winter of 1812.

Practically penniless, he sought service under the Restoration, only to be ruined again through a bank failure. His last appointment was as chargé d'affaires at Lisbon, a position which he held until his death in 1832.

The career of Mathieu de Lesseps was also affected

adversely by political changes. He held numerous consulships, and was frequently transferred from one country to another. Napoleon, when First Consul, described him as "the Government's most devoted and trusty agent." He was given a difficult post in Egypt in 1801 when the French army stranded there was being evacuated. To him also fell the unenviable task of upholding at a critical time French prestige in the domains of the Sultan, which had suffered such a serious blow through the British victories at the battles of the Nile and Aboukir. He succeeded brilliantly. Basil Worsfold rightly says that "whatever of progress was achieved in Egypt before the period of the Goschen-Joubert report (1876) was almost exclusively the work of Frenchmen." That progress was in large measure due to Mathieu de Lesseps and to his son Ferdinand.

The circumstances are worth recalling in view of the important part that Ferdinand was afterwards called upon to play in the internal affairs of Egypt. The Sultan of Turkey's forces had sided with the British, and it became necessary to French policy to find a friend in the Turkish camp. Talleyrand sent secret instructions to Mathieu to look out for such a man. He discovered him in Mohammed Ali, a clever colonel of Albanian irregulars. Mathieu de Lesseps secured his goodwill, and supported him in his ambitions. The British troops had been withdrawn in 1803 under the terms of the Treaty of Amiens, and this gave an opportunity to the Egyptian nationalist party headed by the Mamluks to attempt to overthrow the domination of the Turks. In the resultant conflict Mohammed

Ali seized Cairo, ostensibly in the service of the Sultan, but actually displacing the Turkish representative. If the Sublime Porte wished to maintain its hold on Egypt there was nothing to be done except to make a virtue of necessity, and in 1806 Mohammed Ali was officially acknowledged by the Sultan as Pasha of Egypt.

An Egyptian Pashalik under French influence could hardly be expected to commend itself to Great Britain. Accordingly an expeditionary force was sent out in 1807 to take the other side, and to back up the Mamluks against the Turks. In an inglorious campaign they were decisively defeated, and Mohammed Ali was left in undisputed possession of Egypt. The cold-blooded massacre of the Mamluks, for which he has been severely censured, removed the last trace of opposition.

Mathieu de Lesseps was not in Egypt to see the fruits of his labours. His services were already in demand elsewhere; but Mohammed Ali never forgot what he owed to him. Great Britain also did not forget the part played by the Frenchman, and saw in his son's Suez Canal scheme a further extension of France's designs on Egypt. The bitter opposition of Palmerston developed directly out of the seeds of suspicion sown at this time.

At Malaga De Lesseps père married Catherine de Grivégnée, a Spanish lady, aunt of the Countess of Montijo, whose daughter was afterwards to become the Empress Eugénie. By her he had a large family. It is related that one day, while Mathieu was Consul-General at St. Petersberg, the Czar Alexander met him, and enquired after his wife. "Sire," replied De Lesseps, "she was happily confined yesterday." "What

again!" exclaimed the Czar. "How ever many children have you now?" "An infinite number, sire," replied the proud father, "like to the sands of the desert."

Soon afterwards he was separated for five years from his wife and progeny. In 1809 he was appointed Governor of the Ionian Islands, with his seat at Corfu. His office was no sinecure, as the city was in imminent danger of bombardment by British cruisers. Nevertheless, he managed to devote himself assiduously to building up a sound administration and even to carrying out archaeological excavations and founding an Ionian Academy. He held on to his post through the critical months which followed Napoleon's abdication, and refused to capitulate to the English until ordered to do so by his Government. He urged that "if the English be allowed to establish themselves at Corfu, when they have already got Gibraltar, Malta and Sicily, they will secure the sovereignty of the Mediterranean." His representations were in vain, however, as the Bourbons could not afford to quarrel with Britain. On returning to France, he found that exception had been taken to his patriotic attitude, and he was lucky to get off with the loss of employment. His colleague, the military governor of Corfu, was not so fortunate and was cast into prison.

For a brief moment recognition of his long years of single-minded service came to him with Napoleon's dramatic return to Paris in 1815. He was created a Count of the Empire, and given a Prefecture, and at the same time a grant was made towards the education of his son Ferdinand. But his honours lasted no

longer than the fateful Hundred Days, and with the revival of the monarchy he was forced to renew his old consular wanderings. He served in Morocco, in the United States, and finally in Tunis.

In 1832, with strained resources and failing strength, he petitioned to be allowed to come home. But the necessary authorisation arrived too late. Mathieu de Lesseps died in harness, leaving, like his brother, little in worldly goods, but a name that was widely honoured and respected.

Such was the tradition of self-sacrificing service to France in foreign fields which young Ferdinand de Lesseps was called to carry on. Many years later he quoted the words of Prince Talleyrand, which he must have felt had represented the principles of his family. "Diplomacy is not a science of ruse and duplicity. If straightforwardness is of prime value anywhere, it is in political transactions, for it is that which renders them solid and durable. People have confused reserve and ruse. Straightforwardness is incompatible with ruse, but it is not inconsistent with reserve, which, indeed, strengthens the feeling of confidence."

CHAPTER II

THE YOUNG DIPLOMAT

IN historic Versailles, at the junction of the Rue des Réservoirs and the Rue de La Paroisse, there stands a modest mansion which bears a plaque stating that here Ferdinand de Lesseps was born. It was on the 19th November, 1805. There is something significant even in the date, for this man, who was to demonstrate so effectively in his lifetime that “peace hath her victories, no less renown’d than war,” came into this world between two great battles, the British naval victory at Trafalgar and the French military victory at Austerlitz. The two mighty nations whose mutual goodwill and co-operation Ferdinand de Lesseps strove so anxiously to promote were locked in conflict.

Ferdinand was the fourth child of his parents Mathieu and Catherine de Lesseps. The duties of his father in the foreign consular service prevented the family from settling for long at any one place, and until his tenth year the boy had seen little of his native land. He was less than a year old when the family packed up and found a temporary home at Leghorn, a commodious if somewhat dilapidated building dignified with the name of “palace.” An imposing gateway gave access to the street. “It was beneath this gateway,” De Lesseps tells us in a recollection of

his childhood, "that I saw camels for the first time, those fine creatures which I was to meet so often in Africa. In those days the local wood merchants used to deliver their goods to the houses by loading them on the backs of camels, and we got a great deal of fun out of watching their arrival with their grave and measured gait, bearing on their backs a great stack of timber, and the driver by dint of much shouting steering them under the arch of the gateway."

In 1809 Mathieu de Lesseps was appointed to Corfu, and thought it prudent not to take his family with him. He settled them at Pisa, and there they remained until the events of 1814 reunited them on French soil.

One of his French biographers describes the young Ferdinand as a warm-hearted but boisterous child. On two occasions he nearly succeeded in putting out an eye, and he carried through life a scar on his cheek, the result of one of his sporting exploits.

There was no lack of French society at Pisa. Military men, officials and diplomats attended the salon of Madame de Lesseps. A captain of artillery, Paul Louis Courrier, gave Ferdinand his first lessons in horsemanship, in which he was afterwards to excel. It was a jolly, if rather undisciplined boyhood. The graver aspects of the old Cathedral city would have offered little attraction to a child of Ferdinand's temperament. But he would have enjoyed boating on the Arno, and excursions to the pine woods behind the town.

Madame de Lesseps, good mother though she was, could not help but hold the reins rather loosely in the upbringing of her children. The mails brought

courageous but very worrying letters from her husband at Corfu. She knew and heard enough to realise that his post was one of personal danger. No doubt she sought some relief from a constant anxiety in telling her boys what a brave and noble man was their father. To young Ferdinand that father became a hero, and he determined already in those days that he would follow in his footsteps and lead a life of adventure.

Then came the startling news of 1814 to fill the devoted family with dismay. France was invaded by the allied armies. Paris had fallen. The Emperor, whom the De Lesseps had loved and served, had abdicated. He was exiled to the little island of Elba, a bare seventy miles from Pisa. The new Government of Louis XVIII acted promptly. Mathieu de Lesseps was ordered to surrender Corfu to the English and return to Paris. Almost penniless—he had been supporting the soldiers out of own pocket towards the end—in disgrace with the Bourbons, he put his affairs in order and sailed for France. There he was joined by his wife and children. It was a very different reunion to that which they had so long and eagerly anticipated.

A new home was made on the outskirts of Paris; but the future seemed very grey. Mathieu was without employment: he was fortunate to escape imprisonment. So they waited and hoped through the long winter. In March 1815 a congress of Powers was to meet in Vienna under the presidency of Prince Metternich. Perhaps afterwards, with the help of influential friends, he might be able to return to consular service.

Then the unexpected and incredible happened. Napoleon escaped from Elba. His personal appeal was irresistible. His old soldiers flocked to his standard. Louis XVIII fled to Ghent. To delirious cries of "Vive l'Empereur!" Napoleon entered Paris.

That was a joyous day in the De Lesseps household. Mathieu did not find the Emperor grudging in his reward of loyalty and devotion. He received the title of Count of the Empire, and was nominated Prefect of the Department of Cantal in the Auvergne. At the same time a grant was made towards the education of his son Ferdinand, who was sent at the State's expense to the Lyceum Napoleon, called afterwards Henry IV's College.

But happiness was shortlived. Waterloo wrote finis to the Emperor's career. The Bourbons were back again, and under the new regime Mathieu de Lesseps would not carry on his functions. He would still serve France, but not on French soil; so he returned to his old life of wandering in foreign consulates.

What impression all these stirring events made on the mind of the boy Ferdinand we do not know. He was only nine years old at the time. The glimpses that we have of him during the next few years are still of the same light-hearted, daredevil, adventurous youngster, always inviting accidents, entirely fearless, and glowing from healthy exercise. At college he was contemporary with the sons of the future king Louis-Philippe, and he remembers having a boxing match with one of them. Twice he managed to fall out of a second-floor window, the first time luckily alighting astride a bundle of straw which softened his fall; but

the second time he was not so fortunate and broke an arm. When he was fourteen, walking one day to Saint-Germain, he decided that it was much too commonplace to use the Seine ferry, and proposed to swim the river. "I tied my shoes at the back of my neck with my garters," he says, "I stuffed my shirt and stockings into my hat, which I kept on my head, and cast myself into the river, swimming with one hand, while with the other I held aloft at the end of a stick my coat, vest and breeches. But my powers were not equal to my enterprise. I reached the bank after much effort; but I had swallowed a lot of water, and so had my clothes, which were wringing wet. I had to hang my drenched garments on some nearby trees, while I walked about in a state of nature until they had dried in the sun. That was sixty-five years ago," he adds humorously, "and I had not dreamt of my membership of the Academy."

So, if we do not know much of those childhood days, we at least have a very good idea of the kind of boy who was father to the man. In long walks through the woods of Saint-Germain and Marly, in horseriding, fencing, and other sports, he was building up that powerful physique which stood him in good stead until he was over eighty.

At the age of eighteen De Lesseps left college; but while completing his studies he worked for two years in the commissary department of the army so as not to be a burden to his people. A salary of two hundred francs a month was a very useful income for a young student. He fully intended to follow the family career, and he was very proud at the age of twenty to be given

his first appointment as vice-consul at Lisbon under his famous uncle Barthélemy de Lesseps. In 1828 he was transferred to Tunis, where his father was at this time Consul-General. Thus he had the good fortune in the early years of his service to be helped and instructed by the two men whom he honoured most.

He had a proper pride in his career. "How many things a man must know to make a good consul," Tallyrand had said, "for his duties are endless in their variety, and quite of a different character from those of other officials of the Foreign Office; they demand a mass of practical knowledge for which special education is required. Consuls should be able to fulfil, in the event of necessity, the duties of judge, arbitrator, and reconciler. They must be able to do the work of a notary, sometimes that of a commissioner of the navy. They have to look after sanitary matters, and from them is expected, owing to their general relations, a clear idea of the state of trade and navigation, and of the industry peculiar to their place of residence."

Mathieu de Lesseps was nearing the end of his pilgrimage; but it must have been a great joy to him to watch his son's rapid progress and to note in him those fine qualities which he himself had displayed so conspicuously. Circumstances had kept father and son apart in those early formative years, yet nothing seemed lacking in the young man's character. He was clean living and transparently honest; he had the courage, the directness, the doggedness and the strong sense of duty of the De Lesseps. At the same time he had in him an inheritance from the maternal side,

which developed under the influence of Egypt. There was a streak of fatalism bordering on superstition, a visionary element which warred with the practical. That was his one weakness ; but it was an important one. To sober matter-of-fact statesmen and men of the world it seemed that M. de Lesseps looked too eagerly through rose-tinted glasses, that he tended, unintentionally no doubt, to minimise and to disregard the obstacles which stood in the way of the realisation of his grand projects. He believed sincerely that he was counting the cost, but quite unconsciously he was overweighting the credit side and lightening the debit. In the end this proved his undoing. Yet without his vision and incurable optimism his life would have been barren of its greatest accomplishments, and the world would have been the poorer. It has been said that the glories of Solomon's reign greatly appealed to him : his mind dwelt on merchant ships of Tarshish and the gold of Ophir. He could plan in millions, because the wealth of the Indies was inexhaustable. But nothing of this aspect of his personality was yet in evidence, or could be discerned by his father's keen scrutiny. Mathieu de Lesseps, unable to bequeath to his son any earthly possessions, was at least determined to fit him for his future career by tutoring him in the difficult science of diplomacy. In this way he could make up for inevitable past neglect, and add the topstone of training to the foundations of character.

The father's reward came quickly when on December 18th, 1830, Marshal Count Clauzel, generalissimo of the French army of occupation in Algeria, wrote to him: "I have had the pleasure of

meeting your son, who gives promise of sustaining with great credit the name he bears."

Already in 1829 Ferdinand de Lesseps had shown that he was capable of acting on his own initiative. Yusuf, a young officer in the service of the Bey of Tunis, was flying for his life pursued by the soldiers of the Bey for violation of the seraglio law. Ferdinand came to his rescue, and assisted him to make good his escape. Yusuf showed his gratitude by serving with the French army in the conquest of Algeria, and later became the creator of the famous French corps of Spahis.

Through the seizure of Algeria and Oran France came into possession of her most important colony, and it was the De Lesseps, father and son, who helped to ensure for all time that the great north African territory should not be subject to Turkey or to any other Power than France. Mathieu drafted a treaty by which the brother and heir of the Bey of Tunis was to become Bey of Constantine under the suzerainty of France, and in consideration of a tribute guaranteed by Tunis. The treaty was carried personally by Ferdinand to Marshal Count Clauzel, who approved its terms, and it was duly concluded. Unfortunately, internal disturbances prevented its ratification in Paris. Louis Philippe had only recently become King of the French after the "Revolution of the three days of July," and the Government had little time to devote to affairs in Africa. Nevertheless, the facts are deserving of record, and illustrate how the young diplomat was beginning to be of service to his country.

The real test of experience came in 1832. It was in

that year that Ferdinand was deprived by death of his father's counsels, and in the same year he was promoted to the important vice-consulate at Alexandria. There the name of De Lesseps was already well-known and honoured, and he was to enter upon the work which his father had initiated thirty years earlier.

At the time of this appointment Mohammed Ali was at the height of his powers. The recent campaign in Greece had strained the relations between the Pasha and his suzerain the Sultan of Turkey to breaking point. Europe had come to the aid of the Greeks, and had secured their independence by the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829. Mohammed Ali had no desire to quarrel with the western Powers; his policy required their sympathy and support. The man was a not uncommon blend of the ruthless and brutal soldier of fortune with the clever and sometimes far-sighted politician. His type is familiar in certain presidents of South American republics and Chinese warlords. His personal ambition was boundless, and this led him in the first instance to lend a favourable ear to French overtures. By the introduction of European ideas and capital he saw the means of developing Egyptian resources and commerce, and building up a powerful independent State with himself as the head.

His success had been gratifying. Having secured the Pashalik of Egypt, with hardly more than nominal allegiance to the Sultan of Turkey, he had conquered the Sudan and established Khartoum as the seat of its administration. Now he had despatched his armies under his step-son Ibrahim to Syria, and after a

successful campaign forced the Sultan to acknowledge him as Pasha of Syria as well as of Egypt.

At home he had increased the prosperity of the country by initiating important public works. The irrigation of the Delta was improved, and land and water communications established between Cairo and Alexandria by the construction of the Mahmoudieh Canal. Alexandria became once again the flourishing seaport that it had been under the Ptolemies. In education, European teachers had been imported to conduct schools on western lines, and in the government service young officials were employed who had been sent to France for training. Little was wanting to revive the ancient glories of the Pharaohs.

Mohammed Ali never forgot his indebtedness to Mathieu de Lesseps, and was ready to give a warm welcome to his son. "It is your father who made me what I am," he told Ferdinand, when they met. "Remember, that you can count on me at all times."

In outward circumstances the time of De Lesseps' arrival was not propitious. There had been a grave outbreak of cholera in France, and one of the passengers on the vessel that bore him to Alexandria had succumbed to the disease. Inevitably a strict quarantine was enforced at the port, and De Lesseps had to face a period of irksome confinement. To relieve the tedium of his captivity the Consul-General at Alexandria, M. Mimault, sent off to him a parcel of books. Among these was a volume which greatly interested the young vice-consul, a memoir on the subject of "a canal of the two seas"—the Mediterranean and the Red Sea—prepared by the French

engineer Lepère at the instigation of Napoleon at the time of his Egyptian campaign. It was the reading of this work that directly inspired De Lesseps with the vision that later resulted in the Suez Canal. Thus the project which was for ever to link the name of Ferdinand de Lesseps with Egypt was first brought to his attention while he waited patiently for liberty to set foot on her shores.

It was not long before the vice-consul made himself at home in his new surroundings. At both Alexandria and Cairo he enjoyed the companionship of many of his own countrymen, and he became deservedly popular. One of his contemporaries says of him: "Always to the fore, whether in work or play, Ferdinand de Lesseps was the life of all gatherings. As a cheerful companion, witty conversationalist, tireless dancer, elegant cavalier, and a particularly good sport, he was sought after and in general demand. There was no doubt of his success in the salons, of his hunting achievements, or his prowess on horseback. He rode the most untameable mounts with incomparable fearlessness. His horsemanship endeared him to the Arabs, who themselves excel in this art and have a high regard for those who can handle horses skilfully."

Neither was he behindhand in gaining the goodwill of the Egyptian authorities. Mohammed Ali was already well-disposed towards him for his father's sake, and a further link was forged between them through De Lesseps' friendship with the Pasha's favourite son. Prince Said was the youngest of the ruler's numerous offspring, and gave his father much anxiety through an early disposition to stoutness. The Pasha was

pleased that De Lesseps took the boy in hand, taught him horseriding, and made him take plenty of exercise. The young prince was kept hard at it, working away at fourteen lessons a day alternating with severe physical training, and he was strictly dieted. No wonder that he was thankful to escape whenever he could to the French consulate, where De Lesseps had obtained permission to receive him. There he was free to lie down for a much needed rest, and could enjoy a dish of macaroni of which he was inordinately fond. Chatting with De Lesseps one day, Mohammed Ali said: "As you take such an interest in my son, here is his report. Personally, I pay no attention to such matters. I did not know how to read until I was forty, and I still read badly. Well, in this report, I am only concerned with the last column, which gives his weight for the present week and the week before, with the difference. If he has gained I punish him, and if he has reduced I reward him." Neither Ferdinand nor the Pasha could foresee that the corpulent young prince would in the future be the vigorous supporter of the Suez Canal scheme, and that at its Mediterranean entrance a town would arise, thereafter to be known as Port Said.

No great foresight, however, was required to predict the rapid advancement of the popular young diplomat. After a period at Cairo he returned to Alexandria as Consul-General. It was at this time that he showed a conspicuous example of courage and devotion to duty. In November, 1834, a terrible epidemic of the plague broke out, and continued for nearly two years. More than a third of the native population of Cairo and Alexandria perished of its ravages. De Lesseps worked

feverishly to check the evil. He transformed the consulate into a hospital regardless of expense, and travelled constantly between the two cities according to the gravity of the situation. On one occasion he went personally into an affected area, which the inhabitants had refused to vacate, taking with him a supply of clean clothing from the European colony. He succeeded in gaining the confidence of the terror-stricken people, who then allowed themselves to be removed to the lazaretto without difficulty. At another time, at the lazaretto itself, there were forty-two victims of the plague left to their fate in one room. No doctor would give them attention. Yet De Lesseps fearlessly went in among them himself, and remained for some time ministering to their need. No wonder that a newspaper wrote of him: "The young French consul has shown a courage and devotion worthy of his colours. Energetic, tireless, sometimes foolhardy, he has been concerned to see everything for himself; bending over the beds of the dying he has questioned, consoled and succoured." France made him a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and at an official banquet the representative of the British colony stated "that he had never seen one so young represent his country more creditably, and that the French Government was to be congratulated in having men of the stamp of M. de Lesseps in her foreign service."

We have already had occasion to notice that De Lesseps was endowed with a puckish sense of humour, which frequently stood him in good stead in his diplomatic activities. The following story is typical. At the time of the Egyptian invasion of Syria, all the

able-bodied men in Bethlehem were carried off to serve in the galleys. De Lesseps intervened on their behalf; but he was only able to obtain the liberty of five conscripts a week. The families of the impressed men besieged him with their plaints, and at last he was driven to make a final appeal to the Viceroy. He turned up with his clothes in tatters, and explained to the amazed Pasha that he was in this unfortunate state owing to the clutching hands of his petitioners. "It is all your fault," he told Mohammed Ali ruefully, "and I am never likely to see the end of my misfortunes if you insist on releasing only five prisoners a week." The Viceroy roared with laughter, and immediately gave orders that the rest should be freed.

De Lesseps remained in Egypt until 1838, when he was appointed Consul at Rotterdam, and transferred in the following year to Malaga. He was now a married man. While on leave in 1835 he had met at his mother's home a charming and vivacious young lady, the daughter of the Government prosecuting attorney at the court of Angers. Mlle. Agathe Delamalle was twelve years his junior, hardly more than a girl, with dark hair and bright blue eyes. Ferdinand was greatly attracted by her, and they became engaged. But it was two years before marriage was possible, as he had to return to Alexandria, and he did not again get leave until the autumn of 1837. The wedding took place on the 21st December, and De Lesseps found that he had won not only the love of a woman who was as sensible as she was good-looking, but also the sincere friendship of a mother-in-law who was devoted to him, and who later was to be

his great stay and comfort. Mme. Delamalle was a remarkable woman, possessed of a keen intelligence and sound judgment. She regarded Ferdinand as in a real sense her son, and mothered him accordingly. There was a warmth of affection on both sides that made the relationship a singularly happy one, and in all his wanderings De Lesseps never failed to keep up a regular correspondence with his "*belle-mère*" which was far more detailed and intimate than is common in such circumstances.

There were five children of the marriage, but only two, Charles and Victor, survived.

The confidence of the French Government in De Lesseps' good sense and ability was exhibited in 1842 when he was given the difficult post of Consul-General at Barcelona. This was just before Isabella II assumed full sovereignty of Spain. The country was still in a very disturbed state after the recent Carlist revolt. Moderates and Progressives were at loggerheads, and the countryside was filled with marauding bands belonging to one or other of the several factions. The diplomatic situation was no less tense, England siding with the Progressive and France with the Moderates. The foreign policy of both Powers was dictated by mutual suspicion and fear. The game of check and counter-check was carried on in a dozen different capitals, wherever either nation seemed to be exercising undue influence. De Lesseps had had to contend with this sort of thing in Egypt. Now he had to face it again in Spain. Loyal to France, as he was, his whole nature was opposed to such blind animosity and stupid mistrust. He could say, "It is a fine thing, when

one is working for France, far from France, to hear it said: ‘This is a Frenchman.’” But that natural patriotism and pride of race could never be constricted by a narrow and bigotted nationalism. He could and did with equal fervour describe himself as “a friend of peace and of the Anglo-French alliance.” His sunny disposition had no room for personal or racial rancour or ill-will, and when he met with it, an all too frequent misfortune, he was surprised and hurt just as a child is surprised and hurt. He never bore a grudge.

Barcelona made big demands both on his friendly spirit and on his courage. England had no intention of making his task an easy one, and a Catalonian insurrection subjected him to all the hazards of military conflict. The bitter hatred and the horrors of a Spanish Civil War were manifested on a scale that has hardly been surpassed in the struggle of 1936—1937. Again and again it became necessary to transfer the foreign population to the protecting shelter of warships anchored in the harbour. In repeated bombardments thousands of shells fell on the town. The French consulate, situated between the defending forts, was frequently hit, and its torn roof, broken verandah, and ploughed up garden, were eloquent of the peril in which its inmates stood. Yet the French Consul-General carried on his duties with imperturbable calm, succouring not only the French nationals but many of the Spanish families, parleying for the cessation of the bombardment, and going fearlessly into the rebel lines to gain information.

His conduct called forth many expressions of gratitude and esteem. The Barcelona Chamber of

Commerce ordered his bust in marble, and he received the public thanks of the community lead by the Bishop. The French colony awarded him a gold medal. In presenting it they told him that it was "the result of a unanimous vote. Your children will one day show with pride to their children this permanent token of our gratitude. Posterity, wondering at the symbols engraved on it, will open the story of your life at this noble page, and they will read: 'At this time Ferdinand de Lesseps, Consul of France at Barcelona, proved himself brave, generous, and humane. His conduct was in the highest degree admirable.' "

His own Foreign Minister, Guizot, wrote to him: "The King has heartily approved, sir, the manner in which you have conducted yourself, the measures which you have taken for the safety and welfare of your nationals, the promptness with which you have given asylum, without distinction of party, to Spaniards whose lives were in peril, and the efforts which you have made to divert from a populous town the frightful misfortunes which menaced it."

There were not wanting, however, bitter opponents of the minister's foreign policy, who were ready to describe De Lesseps' disinterested actions as unwarrantable interference, and certain "inspired statements" of an uncompromising character appeared in the French Press. They were answered by creating De Lesseps an Officer of the Legion of Honour. "By this mark of its favour," wrote Guizot, "His Majesty's Government has signified its reply to those unworthy calumnies of which you have been more or less officially the object."

De Lesseps was of an age now when the fires and enthusiasms of youth begin to cool off, when independence is no longer an ideal. It is that age in the middle thirties when a man really feels his need of another's strength and sympathy, whether as a spur to ambition, or simply to make his life worth living. It is a time when the prolongation of his days, stored as they are with travail and the cares of responsibility, seems not to be so desirable, and the institution of marriage reveals itself to him as the wise ordinance of an eternal God. With the fusing of his being with the one woman youth is regained, new hope enters, and continuation is justified. What has been burdensome now becomes sacrificial since there is an altar on which to lay the offering.

His happy marriage undoubtedly explains the spontaneous cheerfulness with which De Lesseps was able to meet the exceptional demands of his work. The heart that was in his service was vitalised by his home. This is proved by the letters of the devoted couple to Mme. Delamalle.

"Your dear Agathe is a pearl among women," her husband writes. "I do assure you that I have fully appreciated her character and sense under the difficult conditions where it was necessary for me to have all my wits about me, and where I could by no means have been assured of my freedom of action had I a wife like most of those I see." And again. "She has borne most heroically the trials which we have had to undergo. I have admired her resignation and cheerfulness in circumstances where I have been forced to leave her in order to carry out my duties which have exposed

me to grave dangers. She has never said anything, nor allowed any emotion to show, which might deter me from what I had to do."

His wife is no less eulogistic. "This revolution has shown how fine he is: everyone loves and admires him. They all say that it is due to him that there has been no bombardment as yet. The authorities trust him; whatever he asks of the new Junta is granted him. Whenever he appears, they say: 'The Consul of France!' and everyone makes room."

CHAPTER III

DELICATE MISSIONS

IN February, 1848, Mr. William Smith left Paris hurriedly in a hackney cab. He was better known as Louis Philippe, King of the French, and his sudden departure signified that the Second Revolution had succeeded. The whole affair was over almost as suddenly as it had begun, and the new Republican Government took office with a minimum of disturbance. Lamartine was now at the Foreign Office in place of Guizot, whose policy had largely precipitated the revolt. One of his immediate actions was to recall De Lesseps from Barcelona.

Leaving his family, the Consul General hastened to the capital. It is impossible to enter into his thoughts as he journeyed north. There had been so many changes of regime in his short lifetime that he cannot have been unduly anxious. Both his father and uncle had suffered in pocket and position from a too steadfast loyalty to a particular sovereign. The son had been taught by them, or had learned, that rulers are only the chief representatives of those they govern, and that it was loyalty to France that really mattered. That had been Talleyrand's creed. It was his privilege to serve France because he was a Frenchman. Yet he had seen too much of revolution and the misery it

inflicted not to wonder what sad sights might greet his vision. To that extent he must have been profoundly relieved to find Paris so peaceful. True, there was a certain tension, and the mob and part of the National Guard were still in possession of the Tuileries ; but otherwise the citizens were going about their normal avocations. If he had any doubts of how he himself stood with the authorities they were speedily set at rest by his new chief. Far from wishing to throw him overboard the Republic recognised his worth and the value of his experience. He had been recalled to receive his instructions on being appointed Minister Plenipotentiary at Madrid. He was promoted.

Lamartine said to him: "We are at the beginning of a Revolution here: we cannot tell if foreigners will be friendly to us. It is important for us that things should be quiet in Spain. You know the Court, the representatives of the different parties, and the population at large; and you have left a very good impression behind you. What I want you to do is to proceed to the Madrid Embassy, because, in the event of a foreign war, a good understanding with Spain is equivalent to 200,000 men on the Pyrenean frontier."

De Lesseps was urged to set out without delay on his important mission. But as he was ready to leave, an extract from a Spanish newspaper reached him, in which it was stated that the people of Paris, after having seized the Tuileries, had stolen the things left there by the Spanish princess who was the wife of the Duc de Montpensier. The French royal family in their hurried flight had left all their most valuable effects behind them, and the Infanta's jewellery was

included. De Lesseps at once represented to M. de Lamartine that he ought to recover this property as its retention would create a most unfortunate impression in Spain. Lamartine agreed, but said that he had no power over the occupants of the Tuileries, and advised him to go and see the Mayor of Paris. The rest of this interesting episode may be told in De Lesseps own words as he recalled the circumstances in his *Recollections*.

“ The Mayor said to me: ‘ The fact is I do not in the least know the people who occupy the Tuileries, and I have no idea what their plans and intentions may be. M. de Lamartine and myself are in a very ticklish position, which does not admit of our coming into conflict with them; but as you have made up your mind to go there and parley with them, I will give you a letter of introduction to their leader, if they have one, in your quality of representative of the Republic in Spain.’ He at once wrote a note, which I regret not having kept, but which I can quote from memory. It ran as follows: ‘ M. de Lesseps is appointed Ambassador of the French Republic in Spain. He would like to take with him the effects belonging to the Spanish Infanta. As she is a foreigner, it would be advisable to respect what property she left at the Tuileries. I will be obliged, therefore, if you will hand over to M. de Lessops the articles for which this young person asks.’ I went with this note to the Echelle wicket gate, by way of the Rue de Louvre, where I saw a number of men in their shirt sleeves, very untidy, some of them wounded and wearing bandages on their heads. They asked me what I wanted, and I replied—

“ ‘ I am the Ambassador of the French Republic in Spain. There is a Spanish newspaper which says that you have been robbing the Infanta of Spain.’

“ They asked me if I believed them to be thieves, and I begged them to take me to their leader, as I had a letter for him from the Mayor of Paris. They accompanied me to the part of the palace which is still standing, and I was presented to M. St. Armand, a captain in and wearing the uniform of the National Guard, who was in the grand salon of the Duchess of Orleans. . . . I had with me the King’s groom of the chambers, who had brought with him a list of all the articles which had been left behind by the Royal Family. M. St. Armand, assuming an air of great dignity and authority, observed, ‘ This is a very long list,’ to which I at once replied, ‘ But when it is a question of giving back what does not belong to one, there can be no question of much or little.’ Whereupon a common man joined in and said, ‘ This gentleman is quite right.’

“ . . . The people thereupon, without further reference to the captain of the National Guard, conducted me into one of the rooms on the ground floor, facing the Rue de Rivoli, where all the effects belonging to the Royal Family had been laid on tables and ticketed, with as much order as in a curiosity shop. On looking them over, list in hand, I could see nothing of the jewellery, plate, or above all of a splendid album, the cover of which was enriched with precious stones, and which contained drawings by the leading French artists. It was a family present given to the Infanta upon her marriage. I was told that, ‘ ragged as you see us, we

stored all the most valuable articles into carts and slept upon them, taking the jewellery and plate the next morning to the Ministry of Finance, and the album to the National Library.' I arranged . . . to have the whole taken to the Spanish Embassy, and gave a receipt for what was deposited in the Treasury and the Library, the transfer taking place without any difficulty."

Having given this typical exhibition of those qualities which amply justified the confidence reposed in him, De Lesseps set out on his return journey. He did not go direct to Madrid; but first of all made a tour of the Spanish frontier on the French side from Bayonne to Perpignan in order to make sure that the agreed conditions were being honoured, that no revolutionary propaganda was being prepared for secret circulation in Spain. Unless some such assurance had been given, his position would have been one of great difficulty at the Court. Spain was not yet fully tranquillised after the Carlist revolt, and friendly relations with France would be gravely jeopardised if there was any attempt to spread the gospel of republicism.

Having assured himself that all was well De Lesseps made at once for Barcelona to fetch his wife and family and conduct them to Madrid. The Catalonian mountains which they had to traverse were still infested with bands of brigands, insurgents and Carlists, the legacy of almost twenty years of political disturbance. The party travelled without escort, though it was offered to them. De Lesseps preferred to rely on his status as a friendly foreign official rather than to seem to favour any Spanish party, and he was in the right.

'Though often challenged, as soon as his identity was disclosed he was free from molestation.

At Madrid the new minister was no sooner installed at his Embassy than he found himself again involved in situations which had nothing to do with his official capacity. He could never resist the appeals of those who came to him in deep trouble and distress, if by any means he could assist them.

He was called up in the middle of the night, and told that a lady heavily veiled, who would give no name, was waiting to see him in his study. Greatly wondering, De Lesseps came down, and as soon as the lady had lowered her veil he recognised her as the wife of General Moreno de las Peñas. It transpired that two regiments had mutinied in Madrid, and some loss of life had been occasioned before their resistance had been overcome by the forces of Marshal Narvaez, Duke of Valencia. Subsequently, General Moreno had been denounced as their leader by the captured sergeants of the mutinous regiments, and accordingly a court-martial had been held and Moreno had been sentenced to be shot within twenty-four hours in the event of his being taken. He was now in hiding, and his wife had come to beseech the French Minister to assist her husband to escape, as he had been able to do on a previous occasion at Barcelona. De Lesseps urged that conditions were now very different, but after some consideration he agreed to do his best. In the morning he went to see Marshal Narvaez, and told him his mission. The Marshal was actually greatly relieved at the prospect of escaping from an unpleasant duty. Moreno had been his companion in arms, and he had

no wish to be his executioner. It was arranged that the General disguised as a serving man should accompany a French family who were that day leaving for Bayonne by the mail coach, while the police were given orders to keep to the far side of the square when the coach started. All went well, and De Lesseps was able to rejoice over another deed of humanity such as he loved to perform.

Shortly after this incident his services were again requisitioned, this time by Mlle. Eugénie de Montijo, the future Empress of the French, and a connection by marriage with De Lesseps himself. Accompanied by her governess she called on the minister and asked for his intervention on behalf of thirteen Spanish officers of a Valencia regiment which had mutinied in sympathy with those at Madrid. All these men belonged to distinguished Spanish families, and the sister of one of those implicated had pleaded with Mlle. Eugénie to save her brother. Queen Isabella had already asked that the officers should be pardoned; but Narvaez had been adamant, and had threatened resignation if the death sentence passed by the court-martial was not carried out. In order to avoid signing the warrant the Queen had left Madrid for Aranjuez, whither she was followed by her insistent ministers.

It was obviously a very forlorn hope that De Lesseps could succeed where the Queen herself had failed. Moreover, in interfering in the internal affairs of Spain he would be laying himself open to severe censure. Nevertheless, he agreed to make the effort. He immediately took horse to Aranjuez, a journey of two hours, revolving in his mind the best course of action.

He decided on a bold policy. The palace was reached only just in time, as the ministers were already gathered together to present the death-warrant to the Queen for signature. At once he sent an usher with an urgent message to Narvaez that he must speak with him. The Marshal came out in some surprise to the gallery where De Lesseps was waiting. To his unspoken question the French Minister, with more confidence than he was feeling, stated his business. "I have come to take leave of you, for you will see that, as the conditions of my mission to Spain were accepted by a sovereign Assembly that I might be able to exercise a salutary influence upon your Government, if it is learnt that Mlle. de Montijo, belonging to one of the highest families in Spain, has unsuccessfully solicited my intervention to procure a pardon which, in my opinion, will strengthen rather than weaken you, there is nothing left for me but to retire and take leave of you." Narvaez listened with amazement while De Lesseps poured out this long sentence. But seeing the determination written on the face before him he shrugged his shoulder and held out his hand. With the suspicion of a smile on his grim features, he said: "Very well, Ferdinand, you may be off with these men's heads in your pocket." De Lesseps did not wait to hear more, but gratefully pressing the hand offered to him, he hastened back to Madrid. There he learnt that the Queen, at the instance of Narvaez, had pardoned the condemned men.

Marshal Narvaez had borne a character for cruelty for the way he had ruthlessly suppressed opposition, and it was said of him that on his deathbed, when his con-

fessor asked him if he had forgiven his enemies, he had replied: "I have no need to do so, for I have had them all shot." De Lesseps denounces this story as an outrageous calumny, and challenges this estimate of the Marshal's character. He had many dealings with him, and always found him a generous and kindly man.

There was another incident, which took place only a few days after the Aranjuez affair. The French consul at Bilbao asked for instructions regarding a delicate situation that had arisen. A French merchant vessel had taken on board forty-five political refugees who had been implicated in some unsuccessful revolt, and had set sail. A tempest had driven the ship back into harbour the next day, and now the authorities had laid an embargo on the vessel, and had demanded that the refugees, who had embarked secretly and without passports, should be delivered up. This time De Lesseps was on the side of the Government. He at once sought out Marshal Narvaez, and told him that the refugees were at his disposal, seeing that the merchant ship not being a man-of-war did not enjoy the privilege of exterritoriality. Narvaez did not hesitate for a moment, and sent orders that the merchantman should be allowed to leave for Bordeaux, taking the refugees with her.

De Lesseps was fated to remain at Madrid for only one year, when he was superseded by the French Foreign Minister, M. Drouyn de Lhuys, who sent Prince Napoleon in his stead. But during that crowded year he won golden opinions for the manner in which he promoted good relationships between France and

Spain. Among other matters he was able to conclude a postal convention between the two countries which had been under discussion for seventy years, and which, while it secured certain privileges to Spaniards, obtained for France the retrocession of the buildings of the Church of St. Louis-des-Français, which had been under sequestration since the war of 1808.

On his departure he was received in public audience by Queen Isabella, who told him: "You carry away with you my esteem, and that of all my subjects." And as at Barcelona, so at Madrid, the French residents presented him with a gold medal, with these remarkable words of gratitude: "So far as it concerned a Frenchman, you have not left a single unfortunate without relief, nor any injustice without reparation. And in brief it can be said of you, that every day of your administration has been distinguished by some good deed that you have done."

Officially, M. de Lesseps was informed that he had been transferred to the Berne Legation; but he was never to occupy this post. Instead, when he returned to Paris, a mission fraught with the gravest consequences was intrusted to him.

CHAPTER IV

THE ROMAN ROAD

IN Ferdinand de Lesseps' published recollections what must seem to the reader a disproportionate amount of space is devoted to his Mission to Rome. Not only is the story twice told ; but page after page is filled with copies of letters, despatches, and diplomatic documents of all kinds, which explain the progress of the delicate negotiations with which he was intrusted, and conclude with his defence of his actions before the Council of State appointed to inquire into them.

The reason is that despite his later triumphs in another sphere of service, triumphs which might well have relegated the circumstances to a dim background of memory, there remained with De Lesseps to the end of his eventful life the keen consciousness of the gross unfairness and injustice which, at the comparatively youthful age of forty-four, had abruptly cut short his diplomatic career. All those achievements, those presentations, those numerous testimonials, which spoke of duty well done in the service of his country and of his countrymen, had counted for nothing if he was to be suspended so readily, so arbitrarily, from office and thrust back into private life. The shock was one from which even his buoyant nature would have

recovered only with great difficulty, had it not been for the help and inspiration of Mme. Delamalle. It is always hard for a man of broad humanitarian views, a real lover of fairplay, to understand how he can be the victim of a narrower attitude and the pawn of policies which care nothing for the individual. His father and his uncle had suffered for devotion to a regime; but he had to suffer from refusal to meddle in the internal affairs of his country. The very qualities which influenced his superiors to instruct him with a task requiring honesty, circumspection, and patriotism, were turned against him when necessity demanded his downfall.

The political history which provides the setting for this tragic chapter in De Lesseps' life story is itself very involved; but it is essential to summarise it briefly.

The scene is set in Rome, where, on February 9th, 1849, a republic had been proclaimed under the triumvirate of Mazzini, Saffi and Armellini. The Pope, Pius IX, had escaped to Gaeta after the murder of his minister Count Pellegrini Rossi in the previous November. There he was under the protection of his former foe Ferdinand, King of Naples and Sicily. Since the Congress of Vienna, when the petty sovereigns dispossessed by Napoleon had been largely restored to their dominions, the greater part of Italy had been under Austrian domination. The Papacy too, with the States of the Church given back into its keeping, owed much to Vienna. But the influence of France remained in the new spirit of liberty that was abroad throughout the length and breadth of Italy. This spirit the returning rulers, Bourbons and Austrians, refused to

recognise. As Talleyrand said of the Bourbons of France, they had learned nothing and forgotten nothing. There was an inevitable clash between the reactionary authorities and the radical populations. But harsh repressive measures and wholesale executions only served to fan the flames of revolt, and drove many of the moderates into the camp of the extremists. Time and again the troops of Austria were called in to put down rebellions, and lend their aid to dying dynasties; but the presence of foreign armies on Italian soil did but strengthen the hands of those who strove for a free and united Italy. Yet there was dissension between true Italians on the issue of Monarchy or Republicanism. Those who favoured the latter adhered mainly to Mazzini and Garibaldi, while monarchists supported the House of Savoy and Piedmont, which was struggling gamely against Austria.

A few weeks after the triumvirate had set up a Republic at Rome, Carlo Alberto, King of Piedmont, took the field against the Austrians. He was severely defeated by Radetzky at the Battle of Novara, and abdicated in favour of his son Victor Emmanuel II. It was at this juncture that France determined to intervene in Italian affairs.

The French policy was by no means clear, except upon the general principle of opposition to Austria. It was particularly desired to counteract Austrian influence with the Pope at Gaeta; but the Government was undecided whether, to secure this, it could go to the length of restoring to the Pope his temporal possessions which involved the destruction of the newly created Roman Republic. There can be no doubt, in

view of subsequent events, that the greater part of the Ministry with the Prince-President Louis Bonaparte was secretly in favour of this course of action; but the knowledge that on the whole the National Assembly was sympathetic towards a sister republic and largely anti-clerical in outlook prevented any open avowal. In the meantime it was determined to send a "friendly" force temporarily to occupy some part of the Italian peninsula. The expedition under the command of General Oudinot landed at Civita Vecchia; but the Republic refused to regard the arrival of another foreign army as in any sense friendly, and ordered its advance to be resisted. General Oudinot, incensed at this opposition, secured full control of Civita Vecchia and marched at once on Rome, before the walls of which he arrived at the end of April, 1849. But the whole population rose against him, and in a bitter conflict on April 30th, successfully prevented him from entering the city.

The news reached Paris on the same day that De Lesseps arrived back from Madrid, and from the diplomatists' gallery he was an eye-witness of the stormy session of the National Assembly.

"A telegram from Italy had just come in stating that General Oudinot, despite the declarations that had been publicly made, had attacked Italy, or rather the Roman Republic, and that the Government was gravely compromised. There was a talk even of sending the Prince-President to Vincennes, of turning out the Ministry of course, and of giving strict injunctions for a complete change of policy. The irritation was very great in the Chamber, M. Ledru Rollin and the rest

of the Extreme Left shaking their fists at the Ministry, and a free fight being imminent, when M. Senard, who was a man of considerable experience, calmed down his friends and got them to adjourn the sitting till the evening, in order to decide what should be done. During this interval the committees of the Chamber met, and M. Senard said to them, 'The Government has acted very wrongly, but it has admitted the fact and has declared that it had given no orders, throwing all the responsibility upon the General. This being the case, if we despatch to Rome, without creating any crisis at home, a man upon whom we can rely, I feel convinced that the matter can be arranged.' He then named me, and added, 'I do not mean to say that he is a perfervid Republican, but he has always served his country well abroad without concerning himself with home politics, and if he accepts a mission he will carry it out faithfully.' "

On the following morning the Foreign Minister sent for De Lesseps, and asked him whether he was willing to undertake the very important mission for which he had been selected. He agreed to go, and offered to be ready to leave within two hours if necessary. His official instructions drawn up by the chief clerk of the political department, M. de Viel-Castel, required De Lesseps to devote himself exclusively to the negotiations and relations to be established with the Roman authorities and inhabitants, with the object "at once to deliver the States of the Church from the anarchy which prevails in them, and to ensure that the re-establishment of a regular power is not darkened, not to say imperilled, in future by reactionary fury." He

was warned to be careful "to avoid allowing the men at present invested with power in the Roman States to suppose that we (France) regard them as a regular Government, for that would give them a moral force which they are at present lacking. It will be desirable, in the partial arrangements which you may conclude with them, to avoid using any expression or making any stipulation which may be likely to excite the susceptibilities of the Holy See or of the Gaeta Conference, which is only too ready to assume that we are inclined to attach no value to the authority and interests of the Court of Rome." Finally, he was engaged "to confer with MM. d'Harcourt and De Rayneval in reference to all matters which do not call for an immediate solution" and "to maintain close and confidential relations with General Oudinot."

The Foreign Minister, M. Drouyn de Lhuys, himself read over these instructions to De Lesseps, whose comment was that it would be impossible to act in concert with MM. d'Harcourt and De Rayneval, as their mission and his were quite different, not to say contrary in principle. The answer was: "Simply send them duplicates of your despatches." The two gentlemen named were engaged at Gaeta on behalf of the French Government in endeavouring to secure from the Papal Court a clear pronouncement of a moderate and liberal policy should the States of the Church be restored and the Republican Government be overthrown.

De Lesseps was summoned from the Foreign Office to the Elysée for a final interview with the Prince-President before his departure. Louis Bonaparte asked to see his instructions, and remarked that he thought

them somewhat ambiguous. He was particularly concerned that if there was armed intervention by the Austrians and Neapolitans, their action must at all costs be prevented from being brought into common with that of the French forces.

A few hours later De Lesseps departed on his difficult and delicate mission. It had been arranged that he should travel by post-chaise to Toulon, where telegraphic orders had been sent for a man-of-war to carry him to his destination. The Government had certainly acted promptly, perhaps too promptly to be sufficiently explicit in their instructions to their agent. It is clear enough that verbally the Foreign Minister had given a much wider interpretation to what was written than was strictly implied, and De Lesseps could hardly be blamed for taking him at his word. A crisis had arisen, vital decisions had been hastily reached, and the agent was on his way within twenty-four hours. The Government was unaware of what events had taken place since Oudinot had failed in his attempt to enter Rome on April 30th. It was now May 8th. There had to be a great deal of latitude allowed to the agent in dealing with an unknown situation, and De Lesseps understood that within limits he enjoyed complete freedom of action. It was easy enough when the position had been clarified by the course of events, and the Government itself had determined on a policy about which it was at the time quite undecided, to turn on their agent and censure him for exceeding his instructions. He had been doing exactly what he had been told, and doing it well and honestly; but what he had been told did not square with what was done

subsequently, and what there is reason to believe was intended all along should be done by the Prince-President and the ministers in his confidence, who for the present had to mask their intentions in deference to powerful opposition from the National Assembly.

It was a clever ministerial move to placate the Assembly, as can be seen from the speech of M. Odilon Barrot, President of the Council. On the morning of May 9th, while De Lesseps was jogging along on his way to Toulon, he was addressing the Assembly in such words as these:—

“ I assure you that as long as I am in office French arms shall never be used for the restoration of abuses. It is with this feeling, in order to learn from trustworthy agents the real truth, and also to convey to those concerned the faithful and precise expression of the intentions of the Assembly and of the Government in regard to the aim and object of this expedition, that the Government has decided to despatch a man who enjoys our full confidence, whom we have put to the test in very trying circumstances, and who has always served the cause of liberty and humanity. M. de Lesseps, to give you his name, has been sent, and we have specially instructed him to place himself in immediate communication with the Government and to keep us informed day by day of whatever may happen. We have further impressed upon him that he is to employ his utmost influence so that our intervention may secure genuine and real guarantees of liberty for the Roman States.”

The language is beautifully vague, leaving it entirely open as to which form of government, Papal or Republican, the Minister held to be the best safeguard

of Roman liberty. The selection of De Lesseps himself, as the Government agent, is seen by the terms in which he is described—"one who has always served the cause of liberty and humanity"—to have been part of the plan to throw dust in the eyes of the Assembly. He was a man known to be an honest patriot to whom no one could raise an objection, who by good fortune had arrived in Paris at the critical moment, and whose despatch to Rome would gain time and save the Government's face. The plan succeeded, and De Lesscps, in his simple belief in the good intentions of his fellows, did not realise that he was being used by his superiors for their own ends. Even after he had been cast aside, and with a whole dossier of official correspondence in his possession, his eyes were not fully opened.

He should perhaps have been enlightened at the very outset by the terms of a telegram which the Minister of Foreign Affairs sent to General Oudinot in advance of his arrival, and dated Paris, May 10th.

"Inform the Romans that we do not intend to join with the Neapolitans against them. Follow up the negotiations in the sense indicated by your instructions. Reinforcements are being sent to you. Await their coming. Endeavour to enter Rome with the assent of the inhabitants, or, if you are compelled to attack, do so with the most absolute certainty of success."

It is doubtful, as will subsequently appear, if General Oudinot would have shown such opposition to De Lesseps, and such impatience of his efforts for peace, if he had not known from his own private instructions what were the Government's real intentions. Indeed,

it is surprising enough, unless there was a definite understanding between the General and the Ministry, that he was not immediately relieved of his command after the public indignation aroused by the abortive attack on Rome of April 30th.

De Lesseps reached General Oudinot's headquarters at Castel de Guido at one o'clock in the morning of May 15th, and lost no time in setting about his business. He had an immediate interview with the General, who was lying ill in bed, and communicated to him his instructions. Oudinot promised his help to bring the mission to a successful conclusion, and at once issued orders cancelling all offensive movements which might interfere with the negotiations.

As soon as it was daylight, De Lesseps went into Rome. It was no easy matter to obtain admission as gate after gate was closed and barricaded. At last, after making a partial circuit of the walls, an open gate was seen, and a young officer who recognised the envoy came forward and provided an escort to conduct him to the Hotel d'Allemagne. He was soon receiving important visitors, including Charles Bonaparte, Vice-President of the Assembly, to whom he communicated the pacific intentions of the French and their assurance that they would by no means make common cause with the Austrians and Neapolitans. Garibaldi was in the city at the time, and having been convinced of the non-intervention of the French forces, he set forth at once with 12,000 men, infantry, cavalry, and artillery, to attack the Neapolitans.

De Lesseps speedily assured himself of the resolute attitude of the citizens, and wrote to Oudinot accordingly:—

“ Having regard to the expectant attitude in which we are placed, it seems to me of the utmost importance to avoid any sort of engagement. I find a whole city in arms, with the populations apparently bent on resistance, while, without any exaggerations, there are 25,000 men ready to fight. If we entered Rome by force, not only should we have to do so over the bodies of a certain number of foreign adventurers, but we should have to strike down a great many shopkeepers and young men of good family, representatives of the classes which defend social order in Paris. We must, therefore, take account of this situation, not act precipitately or implicate our Government in anything opposed to the expedition—an object which it has just declared anew—or to the wishes of the National Assembly. I should, therefore, hold myself much to blame if I did not use my best efforts to induce you to suspend all acts of hostility or any demonstrations likely to bring them about until I have seen you, and been able to give you an account of what I have seen. You are of my opinion, I know. At the same time, I shall declare that our soldiers will not budge an inch. Your attitude and your kindly disposition cannot fail to facilitate an honourable arrangement. We are strong, we can afford to wait.”

Having thus disposed of the possibility of any hasty resumption of hostilities, De Lesseps commenced

negotiations with the Triumvirs. He had the greatest difficulty in convincing the Roman authorities that his intentions were the same as those of General Oudinot and the French Government. "I was asked," he writes in his second despatch to the Foreign Minister (May 18th), "what could be done to destroy the prejudices which existed in this respect among the Roman population. I then told them that nothing could be easier, as you had just written to me under date of the 10th, signifying your approval of the conduct of General Oudinot, who had thought it best to expel from Civita Vecchia an envoy of the Pope, whose presence was calculated to produce a bad effect and hamper our action." He adds that he is being most circumspect in his speech with everyone, "not saying a word more than is necessary to extricate us from one of the most difficult positions in which we have been placed for a long time."

The despatch was accompanied by a long memorandum from Mazzini setting forth the circumstances which had resulted in the creation of the Roman Republic. "The Republic has been implanted in our midst by the will of an Assembly elected by universal suffrage. It has everywhere been accepted with enthusiasm; nowhere has it encountered the least opposition." He begs France to recognise Roman independence and a Government, which is not the capricious fancy of a faction, but the outcome of a common aspiration, and which has brought order and peace. "There is in the heart of this people," writes Mazzini, "one resolute determination, and that is the downfall of the temporal power vested in the Pope,

the hatred of priestly government under whatever attenuated or indirect form it may present itself. I say hatred, not of individuals, but of the government. Towards individuals our people have, thank God! ever since the foundation of the Republic shown themselves generous, but the very idea of a clerical government, of a pontiff-king, makes them shudder. They will fight to the death against any scheme of restoration, and show themselves schismatic to the last rather than endure it." His final word is: "Remember that a return to the past means neither more nor less than organised disorder, a renewal of the struggle of secret societies, the uprising of anarchy in the heart of Italy, the inoculation of vengeance into a people which is only desirous of forgetting, a brand of discord permanently implanted in the midst of Europe, the programme of the extreme parties supplanting the orderly Republican Government of which we are now the organs. This surely cannot be desired by France, by her Government, by the nephew of Napoleon; especially in the presence of the double invasion of the Neapolitans and Austrians."

Mazzini's appeal fell on deaf ears so far as the French Government was concerned. What was desired was to win the Pope away from the Austrians, and to hold Rome so that the Austrians should not get in. There would have been no negotiations with the Roman Republic at all, if Oudinot's attack had succeeded. This was what the Roman Government suspected, and De Lesseps did not realise. He was acting in perfect good faith; but those who had sent him were playing a deeper game.

Mazzini had to complain that though French hostilities were supposed to have ceased, nevertheless Roman messengers were not being allowed free exit from the city to maintain communications with the provinces. They had been driven back by the orders of General Oudinot, and De Lesseps was asked to put the matter right. He wrote back to Mazzini the next morning (May 18th): "I received your letter upon my return late last night. The matter of the messengers shall be arranged at once."

He then proceeded: "It might be inferred from something said in the Chamber yesterday that an attempt would be made to distinguish between the conduct and the intentions of my Government. I think it fair to inform you that if the Powers with which we are about to treat entertain any idea of this kind, or if a language which would be the consequence of it should be made use of, either against the President of the Republic, the Ministers who sent me to Rome, or the honourable General Oudinot, all negotiations would be at once broken off.

" My Government has been charged with having some afterthought. If this were the case I should not have been intrusted with a loyal and humane mission which I intend to fulfil to the very last, and in connection with which I have already found that I can count on your co-operation. I do not doubt but what I shall succeed, inasmuch as the result which we are endeavouring to arrive at is one which will bear the light of day.

" I have sent your note to M. Drouyn de Lhuys. I thank you for it."

Perhaps there was a faint glimmering of doubt dawning in De Lesseps' mind, for in a letter to the Foreign Minister dated May 22nd, he stated: "I am of opinion that General Oudinot should be kept where he is. Whatever you do, do not send him any more siege material. What he wants is a reinforcement of troops, and if he gets them Austria will hesitate to attack us, whereas with fresh siege material it will seem as if we are determined to annihilate Rome, to which I will not in any circumstances whatever lend a hand. And if the intentions of the Government should happen not to be what I believe them to be, I do not hesitate to ask you to recall me, for if I had not my liberty of conduct and was not free to act as circumstances might dictate in the midst of this very complicated crisis my position would be untenable."

In the meantime the negotiations between De Lesseps and the Roman representatives had reached the stage where definite proposals had been drawn up for consideration by the Roman Assembly. These read as follows:

Clause I. The Roman States request the fraternal protection of the French Republic.

Clause II. The Roman populations have full right to decide for themselves upon the form of government.

Clause III. Rome will welcome the French army as a friendly force. The French troops will assist in maintaining order in the city. The Roman authorities will act in accordance with their legal functions.

The third clause was drafted in deference to the wishes of General Oudinot and M. d'Harcourt. Both these gentlemen were anxious for French occupation of Rome, while De Lesseps, the more he saw of the situation, was increasingly against it.

The answer of the Triumvirate was that the proposals were unacceptable; but days went by and no counter-proposals were put forward. On the 22nd, De Lesseps felt it incumbent, after consultation with General Oudinot, to intimate that he deemed that he had exhausted all the means of conciliation, and announced the rupture of negotiations, with a notification that the resumption of hostilities would be intimated a week in advance. This brought an immediate reply that no counter-proposals had been put forward as fresh bases of negotiation had been the subject of verbal communications between the President of the National Assembly, General Oudinot, and the United States Ambassador.

De Lesseps had heard nothing of all this, and at once demanded an explanation from Oudinot. The General rather lamely replied that he had attached no importance to these talks: he remembered that the American Ambassador had left a paper with him, which he had scarcely troubled to look at. This paper contained the counter-proposals. They were impossible of acceptance as at nearly every line mention was made of the Roman Republic, which De Lesseps had been specifically informed must not be officially recognised.

It was disturbing enough to find that the Roman authorities were going behind his back; but further than that De Lesseps was to find that there was an

extreme party in Rome convinced that the French were only playing for time before making another assault, who regarded him as an enemy, and were not above attempting his assassination. Warning came from a man whose life he had saved in Spain. It was the day following an interview which De Lesseps had had with the French residents in Rome. As he was leaving a conference with the Triumvirs to set out for the French Embassy this man came rushing up to him with his hair flying in the wind and exclaiming: "M. de Lesseps, I am in time, as you have not started. Yesterday, when you came down from the room where you had got the Frenchmen together, three men came close up to you. You of course thought that they were your compatriots, and one of them put out his hand. You took it, and then turned round. Well, the man who shook hands with you will do so again to-day, and then the one beside him, who was watching your movements, will cut your throat, as was done with Rossi."

This was serious news. There was no absolute necessity for De Lesseps to go to the Embassy, so he sent M. de la Tour d'Auvergne in his stead, having first put his informant on oath that his substitute would run no risk. He was by no means easy, however, especially when his deputy seemed a long time returning. It was then that Prince Wolkonsky, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires, arrived, and said to him: "When you assembled your compatriots yesterday—I hope you will forgive me for what I am going to say, but we are obliged to keep our Governments informed of all that is important—I took advantage of my familiarity with the Embassy during the time that your predecessor, the

Duc d'Harcourt, was there, to make my way to a small staircase, the landing of which is contiguous to the salon in which you had assembled your fellow-countrymen. I put my ear to the partition and heard all that you said, and reported it to my Government. I was about to do the same thing to-day, when I heard three men speaking in French. One of them said, 'Ah! the scoundrel has not come to-day. If he had come, a few inches of cold steel would have settled the job. Why did not M. de Lesseps come? ' "

Count Rampon, an old schoolfellow of De Lesseps, who was in the room at the time, had seized one of the men, but other Frenchmen surrounding him had pushed this conspirator and the other two out on to the staircase, whence they made good their escape. Presently De la Tour d'Auvergne returned, and De Lesseps asked him eagerly if anything had happened. "Nothing special," was the reply, "only three men came up to the carriage when I was starting and grumbled a little because you had not come."

De Lesseps at once sent a complaint to Mazzini, accompanied by the warning that if the three men were not at once imprisoned he would order General Oudinot to attack the city. The answer he received was that Mazzini had no power to do what was asked. Veyrassat, the man who had saved his life, advised him to see the Triumvir in person, and made an appointment to meet him in front of the Palace of the Consulta at the foot of one of the great statues at one o'clock in the morning.

Reckless as was this action, "I kept the appointment," writes De Lesseps, "and he then insisted that

I should go up to the first floor of the palace, take off my boots, and steal past the soldiers on duty, who would probably be asleep, and find my way into the room at the further end of the palace where I should find Mazzini fast asleep. This was rather a foolhardy and undiplomatic enterprise, but I undertook it, and reached the room where Mazzini was asleep. He had a very handsome face, I thought, as he lay asleep; and though he had been exiled from so many States, he was then still a young man. I waited a little to see if he would awake, but as he did not I shouted his name. He jumped up in bed, looked at me, and exclaimed, 'Are you come to murder me?' 'No, indeed,' I replied. 'If one of us is to murder the other it will not be me.' " Mazzini then embraced his unexpected visitor, and they spent the rest of the night discussing the negotiations.

There were other occasions on which De Lesseps' life was threatened, but by courageous and resolute action he came through unscathed. His position, however, grew more and more unenviable, and it seemed that his mission must inevitably fail. He found himself almost alone. He could place no dependence on the authorities with whom he had come to treat, as their suspicions of the French motives were too deep-seated. On his own side the French commanders, with d'Harcourt and De Reyneval, were impatient of the negotiations, which they no doubt had the best means of knowing did not represent the real intentions of the Ministry. While he was conducting the affair cleanly, duplicity was at work in both camps.

If it had been a shock to find that the Triumvirs had

been having separate communications with Oudinot, to which he was not a party, it was no less upsetting to learn through Veyrassat that Mazzini had been foolish enough to countenance the sending out to the French army a present of cigars each one of which contained a paper inciting the soldiers to mutiny. De Lesseps, acting on his information, visited Mazzini, and was able unnoticed to get hold of one of these proclamations which were lying on the table and to secrete it in the crown of his hat. He then addressed Mazzini. "Do you know what I am told? You were twice led away by your friends, conspirators by habit, and you have twice tried to deceive me. This is the third time. I am informed that you have meditated sending proclamations to the French troops. The French soldier would burn down his mother's house if he received orders to do so. Despite your experience, you do not know the French soldier, and you have consequently made a great blunder." Mazzini stoutly denied the accusation. Whereupon De Lesseps produced the paper out of his hat, and said sternly: "What do you mean by no? I have done to-day a thing that I will never do again, and that is to lay my hand on this sheet of paper." The Triumvir, confronted with this evidence, could only express contrition.

Oudinot was now pressing for a cessation of all negotiations. But De Lesseps held him off pending the arrival of definite instructions from Paris. The instructions never came. There can be little doubt that they were purposely withheld. The General urged that pressure was being put upon him by his officers, who felt that their inactivity was derogatory to the dignity

of the army. De Lesseps had to write a sharp letter, saying that the honour of the army was as dear to him as it was to the General, and that he set great store by the written and verbal instructions of the Government, and of public opinion in France. He asked point blank. "Do you desire, yes or no, to enter Rome by force and assume the offensive without being attacked, or having received any formal orders? When you have once reached the gates of Rome, and destroyed its walls with your guns, how are you going to occupy the city? Are we at once to give notice to the French families residing in Rome that they had better withdraw if they dread the consequences of an early rupture? And are you prepared to make yourself responsible for the consequences of forcing your protection upon an unwilling population?"

The danger was so imminent, however, that the army might march on Rome despite all his representations, that De Lesseps thought it advisable to leave the city and make his residence at the French headquarters, where he could bring his influence more adequately to bear on the impatient commanders.

At a council of war De Lesseps with difficulty secured a vote from the French Generals maintaining the *status quo*. But it was evident that a resumption of hostilities would take place on the slightest provocation, and news that the Austrian forces were advancing seemed sufficient justification to Oudinot for abandoning all attempts at a settlement.

In a last effort for peace De Lesseps was induced to send an ultimatum calling on the Roman authorities to give a definite answer to the reasonable French pro-

posals. A reply was received nine hours before the expiry of the ultimatum, which to all intents and purposes put an end to the negotiations; but this was accompanied by a note and a set of counter-proposals which De Lesseps deemed sufficiently constructive to permit of him keeping the discussions open. General Oudinot, however, was of another opinion, and was resolved to advance on the city. He even talked of placing De Lesseps under arrest. But the latter's firm attitude, coupled with his dropping his hand on the hilt of his sword, temporarily revoked the order for an immediate attack.

De Lesseps forthwith returned to Rome to follow up the communications that he had received from the Triumvirs. He impressed upon them that any further delay in reaching an agreement might have the most fatal consequences. Mazzini at last awakened to the urgency of the situation, though still complaining that the proposals failed to recognise the Roman Republic. He told De Lesseps that if the Assembly agreed to them it would be a proof of the great confidence which he had personally inspired as to the intentions of the Government; for if it should afterwards turn out that those intentions were different, it would be a very dangerous thing for the Romans. "For," he added, "the positions of which we are about to facilitate your occupation, and the privilege which you reserve for yourselves of only repulsing our foreign enemies if they come directly in contact with yourselves, leaves our political existence at the mercy of your good faith."

The Roman Assembly, convened the same day, in a sitting behind closed doors, adopted the terms of the

convention practically unanimously. The result was at once announced to De Lesseps.

As now accepted, the articles read:

Art. 1. The support of France is assured to the inhabitants of the Roman States. They regard the French army as a friendly one, come to aid in the defence of their territory.

Art. 2. By arrangement with the Roman Government, and without in any way interfering in the administration of the country, the French army will occupy the outward cantonments most suitable for the purposes of defence and for the good health of the troops. Communications shall be free.

Art. 3. The French Republic guarantees against all foreign invasion the territories occupied by its troops.

Art. 4. It is understood that the present arrangement is to be submitted for ratification by the French Republic.

Art. 5. In no case shall the effects of the present undertaking lapse until a fortnight after official communication of the note having been ratified.

The Articles were signed by the Triumvirs, J. Mazzini, A. Saffi, C. Armellini.

De Lesseps had caused copies to be made, and he now hastened to General Oudinot and read the Convention over to him. Oudinot refused to sign and there were sharp words between them. It was evident that he intended to take advantage of the recent rupture of negotiations as a justification for launching an attack

on the city. In the end De Lesseps boldly appended his signature to each of the copies, left one on the table, and told the General that he was sending one copy to Paris and returning the third to the Roman authorities.

No sooner had he returned to the city than he received a note from Oudinot formally dissociating himself from De Lesseps' actions, and at the same time it transpired that the General had written to the same effect to the Triumvirs. From both letters it could be gathered that the General had received instructions from Paris which he had concealed from De Lesseps.

Here was a deadlock. On behalf of the Triumvirs Mazzini addressed General Oudinot on June 1st.

“ M. le Général,—We have this moment received with surprise and regret your despatch of May 31st.

“ The difference of opinion between the General in command and the Minister Plenipotentiary of France was not an event for which we could be prepared; and as this difference of opinion arises with regard to a Convention the spirit of which is in entire harmony with the explicit aspirations which recently emanated from the French Assembly and with the well-grounded sympathies of your nation, it is a very deplorable occurrence, and one which may result in the gravest consequences, the responsibility for which does not rest with us.

“ We hope that in the material interests of Rome, as in the moral interests of France, this difference of opinion will speedily disappear.”

Copies of the General's letter and the Roman reply were sent to De Lesseps, who answered immediately:

"Gentlemen,—In reply to yours of this morning, containing General Oudinot's letter and your reply, I have the honour to inform you that I adhere to the arrangement signed yesterday, and that I am starting for Paris in order to get it ratified. The arrangement was concluded by virtue of the instructions which charged me to devote myself 'exclusively to the negotiations and relations which it might be desirable to establish with the Roman authorities and people.' "

But unknown to De Lesseps the day was already lost. The reactionary party in Paris had been steadily gaining the upper hand, and while he was engaged in preparations to return to the capital a telegram reached him from the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It was dated May 29th.

"The Government of the Republic has put a stop to your mission. You will be good enough to start upon your return to France as soon as you have received this despatch."

De Lesseps set out with a heavy heart, but with a clear conscience. He had dealt with a difficult situation in a broad spirit of humanity, interpreting his instructions in a manner honourable to his country and sympathetic to the best interests of the people with whom he was required to negotiate. But it was all in

vain. Even as he entered Paris on June 5th, Oudinot was already laying siege to Rome. With the assistance of Garibaldi's men, fresh from victory over the Neapolitans, the Eternal City held out bravely for four weeks; but was forced to capitulate on July 5th. Mazzini and Garibaldi both escaped.

Back in Paris De Lesseps found that M. de Tocqueville had succeeded M. Drouyn de Lhuys as Foreign Minister, and he hastened to call upon him. The Minister calmly informed him that he had not had time to read his correspondence, and was not very well up in the Roman question. In the Cabinet he found a conspiracy of silence. No one wanted to hear what he had to say. The Government was only concerned to tide over until the Legislative Assembly should take the place of the National Assembly, when the reactionary party would have a clear majority. Not only did De Lesseps find himself abandoned, but arraigned before a Council of State by virtue of an article in the Constitution, which was omitted in future Constitutions. The Prince-President received him goodnaturedly, and professed sympathy with Italy, but he none the less countersigned the decree by which De Lesseps had to answer before the Council for his conduct.

M. Odilon Barrot, who had recommended De Lesseps so fulsomely to the National Assembly at the outset of his mission, now lead the attack against him. He was charged with having made a provisional arrangement with the Roman authorities on May 31st, which compromised the honour of France and the

dignity of her arms. To this De Lesseps replied that he had been careful from first to last to reserve full liberty to the Government, who had only to refuse to ratify the Convention if it was thought that he had gone too far. He asked: "Can the honour of a nation like France be banished because she treats considerately a city which she wishes to place under her protection?" Had he been sent to insist upon the Romans opening the gates to the army under pain, in the event of their refusal, of seeing their houses devastated, and their fellow-citizens decimated by the sword? Or had he been sent to come to an understanding with the authorities for the time being in power, and to give the Romans a proof of France's disinterested friendship? He got in a homethrust by pointing out that the telegram recalling him had been despatched on May 29th, while the Convention had only been reached on May 31st, and the Government therefore could have known nothing about it.

The second charge was that after the negotiations had been broken off De Lesseps should not have allowed them again to be resumed. To which there was the obvious answer that so long as there was any material which held out hope of agreement, as was provided by the letter of the Triumvirs, he had a perfect right, indeed it was his duty, to continue to find an acceptable basis for a settlement.

The third charge was that the continuation of the negotiations had facilitated the revictualling of the city. This was not true. General Oudinot had not allowed the city to be provisioned. Communications were free at the points occupied by the French posts only to

unarmed persons provided with proper safe-conducts and for small quantities of provisions.

The fourth charge was that De Lesseps' actions had needlessly kept the troops inactive. His reply to this was that his mission as a negotiator did not admit of his engaging in hostilities, and that in any case the army was not ready to attack with reasonable certainty of success. In point of fact the troops were not inactive, and preparations for a siege were not suspended for a single hour. It was this continual movement and activity that had alarmed the Roman authorities and had often hampered his negotiations.

The fifth charge was that the prolonged armistice had given time for the Romans to augment their forces, and consequently their power of resistance. The answer was, that there had been no such increase in the numbers of the defenders of Rome as was suggested.

The sixth charge was that De Lesseps should have definitely stipulated for the occupation of Rome by the French. This was contrary to the whole spirit of the mission. The Foreign Minister had publicly stated that he had given no order to attack Rome, and that "he had only authorised the march on Rome on the condition of no serious resistance being offered, or of our being appealed to by the population at large."

Finally, it was charged that the proposals which had formed the subject of the ultimatum would have been met with the jeers and murmurings of the Roman Assembly, so that the negotiations should have proceeded no further. De Lesseps could not agree that the proposals would have met with any such reception. If there had been any prospect of this kind the

negotiations would most certainly have been broken off.

There was a long delay before the Council of State actually met, and when at last it did so on July 30th, De Lesseps challenged its right to try him unless there was some definite wrong of which he was accused which was outside of the province of his natural judge, the Foreign Minister, to deal with. The answer of the President was that there was no such wrong alleged, and that the tribunal was only constituted to examine his conduct. There was neither accuser nor accused. The President then read out the instructions given originally to De Lesseps by M. Druyn de Lhuys. It was immediately evident that a very damaging phrase had been inserted in the copy supplied by the Ministry, which was certainly absent from that which had been handed to De Lesseps. The new phrase required the agent to do "everything which will hasten the end of a régime destined by the force of events to perish." The Ministry must indeed have been hard put to it to make out a case if it had to resort to fraud.

In spite of everything that De Lesseps could urge, the report of the Council of State was adverse to him, and held that he had exceeded his instructions. According to the Council, "The instructions of the Government are in no case to be attenuated, extended, or modified by the aid of outward circumstances or external commentaries not forming part of them." If this finding was to hold good, the Duc d'Harcourt had represented, then all diplomatic action would be made impossible. Moreover, it was obvious that unless some latitude was allowed the instructions were not capable

of being followed rigidly, and the Council itself had been forced to do a considerable amount of interpreting in order to make them imply what had become the subsequent intentions of the Government. De Lesseps had been authorised in so many words to "be guided by circumstances," and he could not therefore justly be blamed for having done so. He had acted throughout in the spirit not only of his written instructions, but of those given verbally to him, and of the public speeches made by members of the Government before the National Assembly.

The unmerited censure was so obviously inspired by the requirements of political manoeuvering that De Lesseps in disgust resigned from a diplomatic service from which he had been more or less suspended. He retired into private life, and for five years the world heard little of him. During this period he acted as land-agent to his mother-in-law, who was in affluent circumstances. At his suggestion she bought a large tract of land in the Berry district, which he put into cultivation, and built on it a model farm. He also restored an ancient castle which had once belonged to Agnes Sorel.

To many a man in the late forties, who had already lived a full life of service and adventure, this might have been the end. But with De Lesseps it was only his Midian.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE TO SUEZ

A CONSIDERABLE literature exists on the origin and development of the Suez Canal. The man who had the glory of achieving its completion, Ferdinand de Lesseps, has left ample records in his *Origines du Canal de Suez*, and elsewhere. We are enabled to follow the history of one of the most important of engineering enterprises almost from day to day. For those who have a mind to study them, there are still the facts and the figures, the conflicting opinions of experts, the surveys, the technicalities of construction. But it was none of these things that fired the popular imagination, and that distinguished the Suez Canal project from so many great works which have been of practical benefit to mankind. It was not even the grave political problems to which the scheme gave rise, or its manifold commercial advantages. The spell of Suez lay in the magic of two names—Egypt and India.

To-day, perhaps, with our rapid communications by sea and air, our easy and comfortable travelling facilities, and with the hand of modernity pressing heavily on the ancient East, something of the glamour has gone. Some of us try to treasure what remains; but for most of us we have to admit that it was only in childhood that he had that sense of terrestrial distance, that awe of strange places, that gilded and

colourful illusion of oriental magnificence, that was the common possession of the average full-grown man and woman down to the second half of the nineteenth century.

Practical man of affairs as De Lesseps had proved himself to be, and fully alive to all the prosaic advantages of the enterprise which had never for long been absent from his thoughts in the midst of his varied and difficult duties, it was yet the fairy-tale element in the proposition that appealed to him most deeply. To bring the rich wonderland of India nearer to Europe by three thousand miles, to fulfil a dream of three thousand years, to unite the waters of two ancient seas, to succeed where Pharaohs, Emperors and Caliphs had failed, that was what stirred and stimulated him. While he attended to the cultivation of the Berry farm lands his mind did not lie fallow. He was studying and revolving in his active brain the means whereby it would be possible to carry through the project which had first kindled his enthusiasm when he read Lapère's report at Alexandria twenty years before. He was no longer young, and an old dog does not easily learn new tricks; but under the domination of this grandiose idea the polished diplomat became an engineering expert. Backed by his ardour and determination, his training in another sphere of service proved an advantage rather than a handicap. He was rooted in no tradition of the schoolmen, and could therefore bring to bear on his subject a vision unclouded by preconceptions, and difficulties which bulked large with technicians who had studied the problem of a "canal of the two seas" gave him no serious concern.

What had he to go upon? There was ancient history. As far back as the second Rameses, the great temple builder, a canal had been under construction to carry the waters of the Nile into the Red Sea. This canal had a long and eventful history. Partially silted up, it was recut by Pharaoh Necho (B.C. 612), who is said to have employed 120,000 slaves on the labour; but it stopped some way short of the Red Sea owing, says Herodotus, to an oracle which declared that the completion of the canal would prepare the way for a barbarian invader. By this "barbarian" the power of Persia seems to have been indicated, and, indeed, it was a Persian king Darius Hystaspes (B.C. 521), who enlarged and continued the canal, so that Herodotus, who saw it, declares that it could be navigated by two triremes abreast. The canal was again carried as far as the Bitter Springs by Ptolemy Philadelphus (B.C. 286), yet even so it was not completed, there being a fear of inundation as the Red Sea was found to be three cubits higher than the land of the Delta. Ptolemy Euergetes (B.C. 246) is believed to have carried through the cutting of the last section, and to have built sluice gates to control the feared inroad of the sea; but it was the Roman Emperor Trajan (A.D. 108) who finally perfected the canal throughout its length and gave it his own name *Trajanus amnis*. It began near Memphis, and followed a course eastward by Heliopolis, through Heropolis to the Bitter Lakes, and having its outlet at the Red Sea port of Daneon. Even at that time the scheme of linking the Nile to the Red Sea by means of such a canal was proved to have little practical value. When the river was at its

lowest level in the springtime there was always the risk of the canal drying up, and so it fell gradually into disuse, except for a temporary reconditioning in the seventh century under the Abbasside Caliphate (A.D. 750-868). Yet in spite of every proof that history offered that this was not the way, it was a modernised form of the old canal that was proposed by Lepère and others as the means of linking Alexandria with Suez by water.

In modern times the suggestion that a canal should be cut direct from sea to sea was first proposed by Savary to Louis XIV, and Leibnitz also advocated this project to the Grand Monarch ; but it was not until Napoleon's Egyptian Expedition that the problem was studied on the spot by a qualified engineer. Lepère's verdict was that two plans were practicable, the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez at its narrowest point at Pelusium, and the reopening of the old roundabout canal furnished with locks and sluices, one part of which would connect Cairo with the Mediterranean and the other part with Suez. Lepère favoured the latter scheme under the erroneous impression that the former presented great difficulties owing to the level of the Red Sea being thirty feet higher than the Mediterranean. He estimated that the cost of his canal would be in the region of £1,500,000, and that it would take ten thousand workmen four years to complete the undertaking. "The work is great," Napoleon had said on receiving his report, "and though I shall not now be able to accomplish it, the Turkish Government will some day, perhaps, reap the glory of the enterprise."

After Lepère many others studied the problem, a

new impetus being given to the project by the activities of Lieutenant Thomas Waghorn. It was he who had the vision of an Overland Route to India through Egypt which would save many days in the transit of mails as compared with sending them by the long ocean passage round the Cape. In 1829—1830 he gave a practical demonstration of the rapidity of such a service, which so impressed British merchants having business with the East that in 1835 he was able to undertake a trial trip preparatory to the establishment of a regular route. In January of that year he sent out a circular letter which is of historic importance:

“ I write to inform you, and other business men having relations with India, that I am leaving England the 5th and Falmouth the 8th of February, by the Postal Steamer for Malta. On arriving there I shall leave for Alexandria, thence by land to Suez, thence down the Red Sea and hope to arrive at Bombay seventy days after leaving England. On this occasion I shall take charge of any letters given me at five shillings each. I shall be happy to accept all letters which your company or your friends wish to send by this rapid route. I shall return to England in November and in all probability I shall travel this route each year in February so that once a year you can count on rapid communication with India, on condition, however that a postal steamer service is not established.”

This deserving enterprise was entirely successful, and the introduction of steam navigation speeded up the

arrangements for a regular service. In August, 1837, the British Government entered into a contract with the Peninsular and Orient Company whereby the British mails were to be carried "through Egypt via the Nile and across the land to Suez," where the Honourable East India Company's Navy would take over and transport them to Bombay. Waghorn made all the intermediate arrangements. The mails, and afterwards passengers also, made the journey from Alexandria to Atfeh by Nile barge, thence by steamer up the Nile via Boulac to Cairo, and finally overland by camel transport to Suez. From 1838, and for some years thereafter the mails by this route bore the cachet "Care of Mr. Waghorn, Alexandria" on the outward journey and "Care of Mr. Waghorn, Suez" on the inward journey.

By his unique undertaking in diverting traffic with India from the Cape Route to the Alexandria—Suez route Waghorn gave the most practical impulse towards the accomplishment of the Suez Canal. De Lesseps, ever generous, saw to it when the canal was eventually opened that his work was commemorated by a bust erected to his memory at its entrance, beneath which was placed the following inscription:

"In homage to the memory of the generous though unfortunate man, who alone, without any help, by a long series of labours and heroic efforts, practically demonstrated and determined the adoption of the postal route through Egypt, and the communication between the East and the West of the world; and this was the originator and pioneer of the great

Egyptian maritime commerce completed by the canal of the two seas."

But Waghorn had done even more than initiate the Overland Route to India. It was he who corrected Lepère's error, and ascertained that the levels of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean were almost identical. This led to the survey undertaken by Colonel, afterwards General, Chesney at the request of the British Government. Chesney had been associated with Waghorn, and in 1830 he plotted out the actual course for a Suez Canal through the isthmus which was the one later adopted by De Lesseps. The recommendations of the Chesney Report were further amplified and developed in 1840 by Linant Bey, Linant de Bellefonds, a French engineer in charge of Egyptian canal construction.

Similar to the Chesney—Bellefonds plan were those submitted to Mohammed Ali by Gallice Bey, director of the Alexandria fortifications, and Mougel Bey, director of the Nile dam-works. These also advocated the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez.

Opposed to their view were three other engineers Paulin-Talbot, Stephenson and Negretti, acting for a company formed to undertake the construction of a canal by the old indirect route from Alexandria to Suez, making use of the dam for crossing the Nile. The inspirers of this scheme were the curious French sect of Saint-Simonians, whose mission aimed at effecting the redemption of human society through the dignity of labour. By the achievement of the canal, stated Father Enfantin, head of the sect after Saint-Simon's

death, "the whole world will recognise our manly qualities."

The Saint-Simonians, garbed in their peculiar costume and singing their rousing hymns, embarked full of faith at Marseilles in 1833. A touch of comedy, however, was given to the occasion by the attitude of the irreverend dock-labourers who were for ducking the disciples in the sea, a fate which they only escaped through the intervention of the police. The Saint-Simonians spent four years in Egypt, where twelve of their number perished of disease. But their undertaking only progressed as far as determining the course of their canal and some desultory digging, and in the end they were forced to abandon the work through failure to obtain a concession.

Later they associated themselves with the foundation of a *Société d'Etudes pour le canal de Suez*. Robert Stephenson, however, a son of the famous inventor of the steam engine, who was one of the engineers engaged by the Society, soon threw up the whole scheme in favour of a railroad from Alexandria to Cairo and Suez. The British Government was strongly in favour of the railway, which would put the finishing touch to Waghorn's work, and which they felt involved no political issues. They were just as strongly opposed to any canal scheme, considered to be costly, impracticable, and likely to lead to international complications. Father Enfantin protested bitterly at what he described as Stephenson's base desertion, and sought to secure the intervention of Russia and Turkey to stop the railway, but without success.

Such was the position when De Lesseps began to

renew his former interest in a Suez canal. No longer was there an insufficiency of data. During the intervening years many clever engineers had been occupied with the problem; and it only remained for the right man to see clearly which of the several schemes was the most practical, and with courage and determination to carry through the project to a successful conclusion.

The first obstacle, indeed the most difficult of all, that stood in the way was that of obtaining a concession. No one had yet been fortunate in securing this. If the scheme had been cut and dried some years previously Mohammed Ali might have granted it: but he had grown old and almost imbecile. Ibrahim Pasha, his deputy, did not survive him, and ruled only for two months. He was succeeded by the vicious Abbas Pasha, a weak prince who had few interests apart from his personal pleasures. Yet it was in the reign of Abbas that De Lesseps put out a feeler, and this he did in a letter to his friend Ruyssenaers, the Dutch Consul-General in Egypt. The letter is dated from Paris, July 8th, 1852.

“ It is now three years since I asked and obtained permission to be placed upon the retired list as Minister Plenipotentiary in consequence of what occurred in reference to my mission to Rome.

“ Since that time I have been studying in all its different bearings a question which I had already been considering when we made acquaintance with each other in Egypt twenty years ago.

“ I confess that my scheme is still in the clouds, and I do not conceal from myself that, as long as

I am the only person who believes it to be possible, that is tantamount to saying it is impossible. What is wanting to make it acceptable to the public is a basis of some kind, and it is in order to obtain this basis that I seek your co-operation.

“I am referring to the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez, which has been talked of from the earliest historical times, and which, for that very reason, is regarded as impossible of execution. For we read, in fact, in the geographical dictionaries that the project would have been carried out long since if the obstacles to it had not been insurmountable.

“I send you a memorandum which embodies my ancient and more recent studies, and I have had it translated into Arabic by my friend Duchenoud, who is the best of the Government interpreters. This document is a very confidential one. You will form your own opinion as to whether the present Viceroy, Abbas Pasha, is the man to comprehend the benefit which this scheme would confer upon Egypt, and whether he would be disposed to aid in carrying it out.”

The answer that came was decidedly in the negative. Abbas Pasha was not the man to concern himself with such an undertaking. A further feeler put out towards Constantinople brought no better result. Turkey could not take the initiative for a work to be executed in Egypt, where the Viceroy alone had the right to decide what should be done.

So for a time the great scheme had to be shelved, and De Lesseps concentrated his attention once more upon the model farm.

CHAPTER II

CONFLICT AND A CONCESSION

IT was fortunate for De Lesseps that the Suez Canal scheme had taken a firm hold of him, providing him with a continual mental stimulus and an objective that was worth living and striving for. Tragedy came to the Manor of Chesnaye. Of De Lesseps' three surviving sons one took ill and died of scarletina. Charles the eldest was also attacked, but recovered. Then Mme. de Lesseps, who had been nursing her children devotedly, herself contracted the illness, and died shortly afterwards. To the stricken husband it was as if the heavens had fallen and impenetrable darkness had rushed in and overwhelmed the light. Agathe had been still in her thirties, with the bloom of youth yet upon her. The couple had been blissfully happy throughout the too brief years of their married life, and the shock to De Lesseps' sensitive nature was a terrible one. His mother-in-law, Mme. Delamalle, proved a tower of strength to him at this grievous time. The unusual bond of affection which from the beginning had subsisted between them was drawn tighter, and her great heart gave sorely needed comfort in the bleak months that followed.

At last one day there came a dramatic moment which promised new life to the bereaved country squire. He

writes of it in a letter to Ruyssenaers dated September 15th, 1854.

“ I was busy with my masons and carpenters, who are building an additional storey to the old manor-house of Agnes Sorel, when the postman appeared in the courtyard with the Paris letters. They were handed up to me by the workmen, and what was my surprise to learn of the death of Abbas Pasha, and the accession to power of our early friend, the intelligent and sympathetic Mohammed Said! I at once came down from the building, and lost not an hour in writing to the new Viceroy to congratulate him on his accession. I reminded him that the course of political events had left me idle, and that I should take advantage of my liberty to go and present him my homage, if he would let me know the time of his return from Constantinople, where he was to go for investiture.

“ He replied at once, and fixed the beginning of November for me to meet him at Alexandria. I wish you to be one of the first to know that I shall be punctual in arrival. What a pleasure it will be to meet again upon the soil of Egypt, where we first came together! Do not say a word about the piercing of the isthmus before I arrive.”

New hope, new vitality, filled De Lesseps' being, and restored to him much of his youthful ardour and enthusiasm. With almost boyish haste he set about his preparations for departure, and by the end of October he was on board the Messageries steamer

Lycurgue, looking out across the stretch of deep blue waters that separated him from his goal.

With what joy he saw again the sandy foreshore of Egypt, the bustling port of Alexandria, and there away to the left on its promontory the Viceroy's palace of Ras el-Tin. Eagerly he drank in every sight and sound. On the landing stage were old friends to welcome him, Ruyssenaers and Hafouz Pasha, Minister of Marine. He was received in semi-state. A court carriage was in waiting to drive him to his residence, one of his Highness's own villas two and a half miles from the city in verdant surroundings on the banks of the Mahmoudieh Canal. The rays of immemorial Ra, the sun-god of Egypt, sent a genial warmth coursing through his veins. He wrote home a glowing account to Mme. Delamalle.

"A whole battalion of servants was drawn up on the flight of stone steps, and they saluted me three times, putting out their right hands to the ground and then carrying them up to their foreheads. They were all Turks and Arabs, with the exception of a Greek valet and a Marseilles cook named Ferdinand. . . . An officer of the Viceroy subsequently came to inform me that his Highness would receive me at twelve at the Gabbari Palace. I thought that from the very fact of my having known the Prince when he was in a very different position that it was all the more incumbent upon me to treat him with respectful deference which is always so acceptable to the human heart. So I fastened on to my dress coat all my stars and orders. The

Viceroy received me with great affection, speaking to me of his early days, of how I had sometimes taken his part when his father was very severe upon him, of the persecution to which he had been subjected during the reign of Abbas Pasha, and, lastly, of his desire to do what was right and make Egypt prosperous. . . . When I returned to my pavilion at eleven in the evening I found all my staff of servants drawn up in the same order as before; and the chef showed me a very luxuriantly laid-out table, decorated with flowers, and with several covers laid. He said that orders had been given for the table to be served in the same way both morning and evening. I told him that I should only avail myself of this in the morning, and that I intended to go to my bedroom. Two footmen came forward to help me mount the staircase, which was brilliantly illuminated. Just for once I allowed them to do so, with all due gravity, as became the friend of a sovereign, who ought to appear as if he was accustomed to receive similar homage."

One can read in this naïve record how his starved soul was gratified by the provision made for him. Once again he was someone, Ferdinand de Lesseps, friend of princes.

Each day he finds time to send long letters to Chesnaie, and always they are to the same effect. The Viceroy and himself recline on a divan enjoying their pipes and coffee. They talk of many things; but not yet of the Suez Canal. The Viceroy sends him a fine Arab steed. He is to accompany the Viceroy and his troops to Cairo.

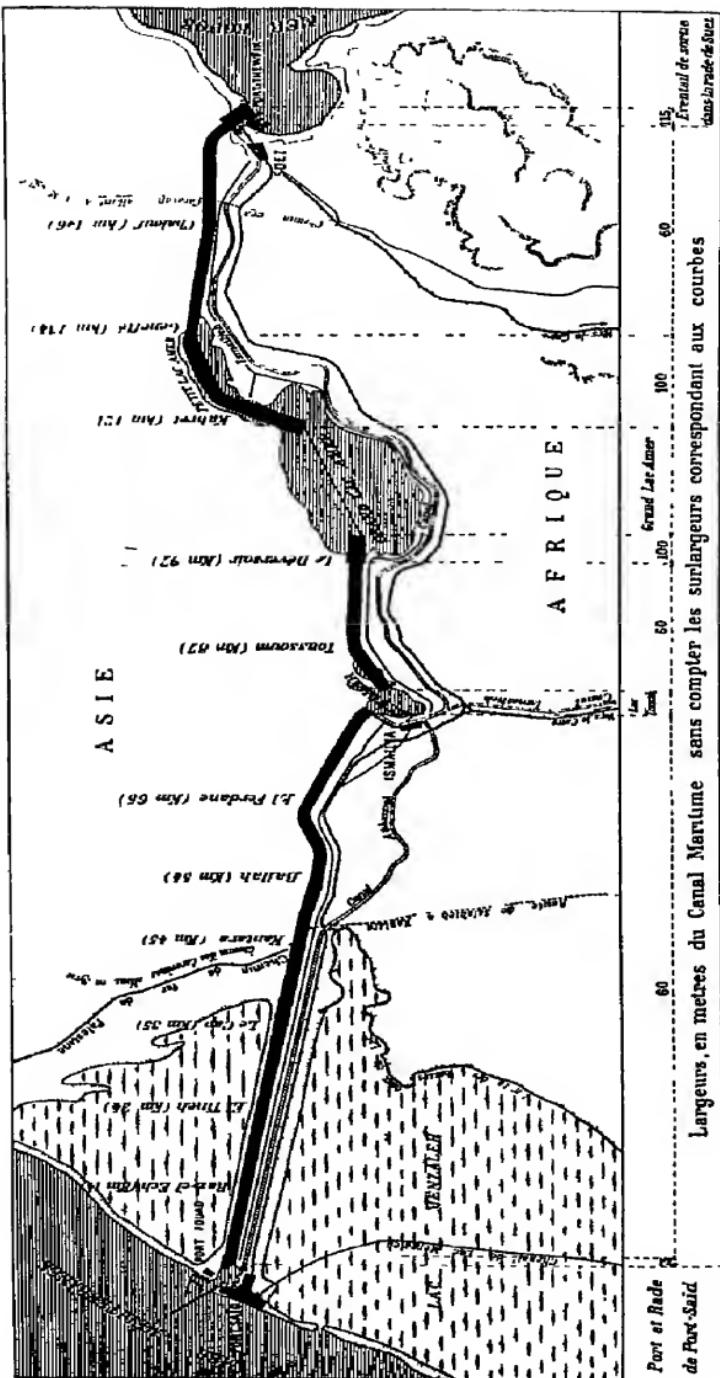
Then it is dawn in the desert encampment. "A few rays of the sun begin to illuminate the horizon, when suddenly there appears in the west, where the sky is cloudy, a very brilliant rainbow, running from east to west. I confess that my heart beat violently, and that I was obliged to put a rein upon my imagination, which was tempted to see in this sign of alliance spoken of in the Scriptures, the presage of the true union between the western and the eastern world, and the dawning of the day for the success of my project.

"The Viceroy's presence served to draw me out of my reverie. . . . We rest under the shade of the carriage, while the chasseurs build up a circular parapet formed of stones which they had picked up, and in this parapet they make an embrasure into which a gun is placed to salute the troops from Alexandria which are just coming in sight. When I leave the Viceroy to go and get my breakfast, in order to show him how well my horse can jump, I put him over the parapet and gallop off to my tent."

Later.

"At five o'clock I again mounted my horse and came up to the Viceroy's tent by way of the parapet. He was very bright and good tempered, and taking me by the hand, he led me to a divan and made me sit by his side. We were alone, and through the opening of the tent I could see the setting of the sun which, at its rising that morning, had so stirred my imagination. I felt inwardly calm and assured at the moment of entering upon a question which

was to be decisive of my future. I had clearly before me my studies and conclusions with regard to the canal, and the execution of the work seemed so easy of realisation that I felt little doubt as to being able to convince the Prince of this. I set out my project, without entering into details, dwelling upon the principal facts and arguments set out in my memorandum, which I had by heart. Mohammed Said listened with evident interest to what I had to say, and I begged him if there were any points which did not seem clear to him to mention them to me. He, with considerable intelligence, raised a few objections, with respect to which I was able to satisfy him, as he at last said to me: 'I am convinced; I accept your plan; we will concern ourselves during the rest of our expedition as to the means of carrying it out. You may regard the matter as settled, and trust to me.' Thereupon he summoned his generals, bade them seat themselves upon some folding chairs which were just in front of the divan, and repeated the conversation we had had together, asking them to give their opinions as to the proposals of his 'friend,' as he was pleased to call me to these improvised advisers, better suited to give an opinion as to a cavalry manœuvre than a gigantic enterprise, the significance of which they were incapable of understanding. They stared at me and looked as if they thought that their master's friend, whom they had just seen put his horse over a wall, could not be otherwise than right, they raised their hands to their heads as their master spoke in sign of assent."



MAP OF THE SUEZ CANAL

Such were the unusual and romantic circumstances in which the great Suez Canal scheme obtained its influential patron.

Laughter and tears were very near each other as De Lesseps galloped happily away that evening. Tears at the graciousness of Providence, which he felt was watching over him. Laughter at the feat of horsemanship which seemed to have played such an unexpected part in bringing about the desired result.

There was no sleep for him that night. In the darkness that shrouded the camp one lamp at least was kept burning. The ancient stars looked down out of the black velvet vault of Egypt's skies, and watched while a man out of the west shaped and polished with precision the Memorandum that portended the fulfillment of an age-old dream which to them had long been familiar.

“Camp of Marea, November 15th, 1854. The joining together of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea by a navigable canal is an enterprise the utility of which has attracted the attention of all the great men who have reigned or been for a time in Egypt: Sesostris, Alexander, Caesar, the Arab conqueror Amru, Napoleon I, and Mohammed Ali. . . .”

—so the writing began, and worked itself up to crescendo.

“Mohammed Said has not been slow to see that there was no work which, as regards the grandeur and utility of its results, could compare with this. What a glorious record for his reign, what an in-

exhaustible source of wealth for Egypt it will be! The names of the Egyptian sovereigns who erected the pyramids, those monuments of human pride, remain unknown. The name of the Prince who opens the great maritime canal will be blessed from century to century, down to the most distant posterity. The pilgrimage to Mecca secured for all time and made easy for Mohammedans; an immense impulse given to steam navigation and long voyages; the countries along the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf, the eastern coast of Africa, India, the kingdom of Siam, Cochin China, Japan, the vast Chinese Empire, the Philippine Islands, Australia, and that vast archipelago towards which the emigration of ancient Europe is tending, all brought three thousand leagues nearer to the basin of the Mediterranean, as well as to the north of Europe and America: such are the sudden and immediate results of piercing the Isthmus of Suez. . . .”

Events now moved rapidly forward. On the Nile steamer the Viceroy asked what engineer would make the preliminary investigations on the spot. De Lesseps recommended Linant Bey, with Mougel Bey to assist him. Their report would be submitted to English, French and German engineers, and then laid before a commission over which he himself would preside. At Cairo the Viceroy advised an interview with Mr. Bruce, the British Consul-General, and De Lesseps had a long discussion with him, and was greatly encouraged by hearing his personal opinion that so long as the scheme did not involve the intervention of any foreign Power,

and that the work was carried out with capital privately subscribed, he did not think that any difficulty would be raised in England.

The next day the Viceroy received the state functionaries and foreign representatives and publicly announced his resolution to open up the Isthmus of Suez by means of a maritime canal, and that he was entrusting the formation of a company composed of the capitalists of all nations to M. Ferdinand de Lesseps. Mr. Bruce was somewhat ill at ease at this determined official statement, made before his Government had had any opportunity to consider it; but the representative of the United States responded in a favourable sense. The Viceroy was in high spirits. "Well, M. de Leon," he addressed the latter, "we are going to start an opposition to the Isthmus of Panama, and we shall be done before you."

The audience ended, to be followed immediately by the hasty penning of numerous despatches as the various foreign representatives rushed to communicate to their respective Governments the momentous news.

All this had happened within three weeks from the day that De Lesseps had set foot in Egypt. His boldness, his address, his enthusiasm, his powers of persuasion, his standing with the Viceroy, had carried all before him. The right man, at the right time, and in the right way, had successfully launched the great enterprise. It was a personal triumph.

De Lesseps was not a man to rest on his laurels. No sooner had he obtained Said's support than he set about prosecuting his enterprise with vigour. It was in his nature to hustle, to get things done. Probably he

already realised that he had only taken the first fence, and that more formidable obstacles lay ahead. He had more than a suspicion that England would be against him, and he was bent on securing his position before any opposition could take concrete form. Hence a letter of December 3rd, 1854, rattled off to Richard Cobden, M.P., "friend of peace and of the Anglo-French Alliance," hoping that he may count on his support should the need arise. But in any circumstances De Lesseps would not have been dilatory, and it is no surprise to find him at once setting off for Suez in company with Linant and Mougel Bey. There they found remains of the ancient canal still visible, and the bed of it measuring just the breadth of 90 cubits spoken of by Herodotus. Two months were spent in rapid reconnoitring, and by the middle of January, 1855, a rough but useful report was ready.

The beginning of February saw De Lesseps *en route* for Constantinople. The firman of concession had one catch in it, it required the ratification of the Sultan of Turkey, the Viceroy's suzerain, before work could be begun. The ardent Frenchman had moved so rapidly that no external policy had yet been formulated either for or against the scheme.

It was by no means a suitable time to be seeking favours of the Sublime Porte. The Crimean War was in full swing, and Constantinople was a hot-bed of intrigue. Dominating the political situation, and intimidating the Turkish officials, was the ruthless and uncompromising personality of the "Great Eltchi," Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, the British Ambassador. The Grand Vizier, and even the Sultan himself it was

said, was under his thumb. To get anywhere, one had to get past him, a man insular and prejudiced to a degree, who disliked all Frenchies, hated the Russians, and refused to demean himself by attempting to learn the language of the country to which he was accredited.

De Lesseps soon discovered what he was up against when he tried to make an independent move. He had been diplomatic enough to remain quietly for a day or two in Constantinople sounding useful officials, and getting their reaction to the Canal scheme, before seeking an interview with the Grand Vizier. And after a conference of two hours with Reschid Pasha, and finding him favourably impressed, he was most careful to point out that he had come as a friend of the Porte, and not as an agent of the French Government. He was the agent of the Viceroy of Egypt, and of no one else.

Of course Lord Stratford de Redcliffe was fully informed of De Lesseps' arrival and the nature of his errand, and was determined to render his visit abortive if he possibly could do so. This became apparent directly the Vizier broached the subject to him. De Lesseps realised immediately the necessity for quick action. The British Ambassador, ready as he was on occasion to use his independent judgment and consult his Government afterwards, dare not go too far in such a grave matter without proper instructions. But he could, and fully intended to, prevent a decision being taken before his instructions arrived. It became a race to secure the Sultan's consent to the concession before Lord Stratford could influence him against it.

De Lesseps moved quickly. He enlisted the

sympathetic support of the representatives of other European Powers, sought an immediate audience with the Sultan through the French Embassy, and addressed a note to the Turkish Imperial Council, in which he stated:

“ It would be superfluous to dwell in detail upon the immense advantages of the piercing of the Isthmus of Suez. The only obstacles which seem to stand in the way are the personal objections raised by a foreign representative, objections which, if they were allowed to prevail, would inflict a moral blow upon the highest authority in the land. I feel confident that this obstacle will not be allowed to prevail against the wishes which I have been charged to express, with all respect, on behalf of an enlightened Prince, who, as is his duty, does an act of deference to his sovereign, whose faithful and devoted vassal it is his pleasure to prove himself.”

But quick as he had been, Lord Stratford de Redcliffe had been quicker, and when he was received in audience by the Sultan it was to find that the Ambassador's influence had been strong enough to deter the Sultan from sanctioning the project outright. De Lesseps decided that the only thing to do was to challenge the “Great Eltchi” to come out into the open and produce his objections. He sent him a long letter the following day.

“ I hasten to communicate to you the documents which, in accordance with the wish expressed by you,

will enable you to form an opinion as to the enterprise which has brought me to Constantinople. I venture to hope that I shall no longer have to fight against the powerful opposition of the honourable representative of Great Britain.

“ Your Excellency was pleased to tell me that you were anxious for information on the subject, and that up to the present time you had only given a personal opinion.

“ The question has been submitted in due course to the Sublime Porte without any sort of foreign intervention. It would not be within my province, as the agent of Mohammed Said, to place it upon another ground, as your Excellency suggested. The Viceroy of Egypt was at liberty to place it upon this ground and to keep it there. Just as he was unwilling to give it a purely French or Austrian complexion, in the same way he would not assent to give it an exclusively English aspect by transferring the discussion of it to London, and letting the solution of it depend on one Government. He is anxious that this affair of the Suez Canal should retain, above all things, its Egyptian and Ottoman initiative.

“ Your Excellency is too enlightened a patriot and attaches too much importance to the alliance between our two countries—an alliance of which I am proud to be one of the warmest partisans—to allow a question of antagonism, in which it would be deplorable that the *amour-propre* of our two Governments should be involved, to arise in this connection.

“ Your Excellency will not allow it to be said that England, which with justice declares that she has

only drawn the sword against Russia in the interests of civilisation, of the freedom of the seas, and of the independence of Turkey, should be the only Power to place difficulties in the way of a work which essentially favours the realisation of principles which should be the consequence of the Anglo-Austro-French alliance, and which will assure the pacification of the East.

“ I am pleased, my lord, to have had this conversation with you. It has had the effect of destroying impressions which, I do not hesitate to say, I had erroneously formed. I ask your permission to renew the conversation, and with that view I will call at the English Embassy about one to-morrow.”

But the wily Ambassador was not to be drawn with fair words, and replied immediately :

“ I write you at an early hour, not only to acknowledge the receipt of the documents which accompany your note, but also to ask you to defer till another day your proposed visit. Engagements which I cannot put off make it impossible for me to avail myself of your obliging proposal to-day.

“ You are right in supposing that I am anxious for information, and especially in respect to this or to any other great enterprise which closely touches the interests of more than one State, and which, while being theoretically so seductive, causes a great division of opinion from the practical point of view.

“ You are too enlightened and experienced to com-

plain if I do not say more. The various considerations which you have touched upon in a manner at once delicate and flattering to myself, are at the same time of too high a political order to be entered upon here.

"In a position such as mine, personal independence has its limits, and cannot but yield at times to official eventualities."

It was obvious to De Lesseps that he could advance his cause no further at present by staying on at Constantinople. The influence of the British Ambassador was too considerable to allow the Sultan to give any kind of definite assent. The position could not even be clarified by the arrival of clear instructions from the British Government. It was too perilous to play a waiting game. The best plan of action seemed to be to get back to Egypt and report to the Viceroy, and if possible persuade him to proceed on his own initiative, accepting the Sultan's evident goodwill as tacit consent.

He had reckoned however without the long arm of Lord Stratford, who had terrorised the Vizier into sending an alarmist letter to Mohammed Said. The Viceroy was threatened with an attack by the British Fleet. He was told that he was foolish to throw himself into the arms of France, whose Government and whose agents were very unstable, whereas the English agents, on the contrary, were always backed up and supported. He was further told that the internal tranquility of France and her external influence were at the mercy of a pistol shot to which the Emperor

Napoleon might at any moment succumb, and more to the same effect.

The Viceroy was justly incensed at these veiled and expressed threats. The British Government, however, continued to refrain from expressing any official opinion, so that the only way to bring matters to a head was to carry the war into the enemy's country. De Lesseps decided to proceed to London.

CHAPTER III

BEARDING THE LION

HAVING armed himself in Paris with letters of introduction to the Banking Houses of Rothchild and Baring Brothers, *The Times* newspaper, and to many persons of rank and consequence, De Lesseps arrived in London in June, 1855.

It was not an auspicious time to descend on the capital. The Crimean War from a commercial and financial point of view was calculated to concentrate attention on the uncertainties of the Near East rather than on its advantages. Lord Palmerston, at the ripe age of seventy, had only recently become head of the Government, and his antipathy towards France, in spite of the alliance subsisting between the two countries, was well-known. To attempt the conversion of such an uncompromising statesman was indeed a Herculean task.

Nevertheless, De Lesseps proceeded at once to the attack, and called upon the Prime Minister with one of his letters of introduction. He was received immediately, and no time was lost in getting down to business. De Lesseps pressed for definite objections to his scheme to be stated instead of airy generalities ; but Palmerston remained bland, courteous, and non-committal. Finally, however, he leaned forward, and with a great

show of taking his visitor into his confidence, he said: "M. de Lesseps, I will not hesitate to tell you what my apprehensions are. They consist, in the first place, of the fear of seeing the commercial and maritime relations of Great Britain upset by the opening of a new route, which, in being open to the navigation of all nations, will deprive us of the advantages which we at present possess. I will confess to you also that I look with apprehension to the uncertainty of the future as regards France—a future which any statesman is bound to consider from the darkest side, unbounded as is our confidence in the loyalty and sincerity of the Emperor; but, after he has gone, things may alter."

To the ardent advocate of the enterprise such deliberate obtuseness was incomprehensible. Could not the Prime Minister appreciate the special advantage to England of the shortening of the route to India by three thousand leagues? And if England should unfortunately ever be at war with France, was it likely that she would send an expedition to India when her enemy's coast was less than two hours' distant?

He went away very dissatisfied. But what Palmerston had been too polite to say was that really he considered the whole project chimerical.

De Lesseps found Lord Clarendon, the Foreign Secretary, no less opposed to the scheme from a political point of view, though less dogmatic. He at least was prepared to examine the matter thoroughly without prejudice. Among the parliamentary rank and file Robert Stephenson was bitterly hostile, and in speech and writing roundly and authoritatively, as an engineer, declared that such a canal as was contemplated was

impossible of execution. It will be remembered that Stephenson was one of the engineers who had worked for the Saint-Simonians.

The Press, also, was derisive. *The Times* pontificated about the natural obstacles which were bound to nullify the enterprise "in a land where the face of nature is changed by a tempest of wind. . . . A single night of storm will engulf everything in the sand." While the halfpenny *Daily News* sarcastically stated that "the literature of fiction is not dead in the land of Alexander Dumas and Monsieur de Lesseps. The most extravagant romancers are children compared with the great discoverer of a new Pelusium, trying to convince his audience that 250 sick Europeans and 600 conscripted Arabs will accomplish this stupendous work, without money, without water, without stones. . . ."

De Lesseps was not in the slightest degree discouraged by these pin-pricks. He held his head high, and many a shrewd business man was impressed by the burning conviction of the clear-sighted Frenchman. He crusaded up and down the country, lecturing, exhorting, cajoling, a monument of tireless energy. He launched a circular at the Members of Parliament, Merchants, Indian Shipowners, etc. He addressed Chambers of Commerce. He knew who were the real masters of Mid-Victorian England. Let the politicians bleat about international complications! They counted for nothing. He could rally the City to his standard and force their hands. "I have come to England to place the matter clearly before the eyes of the public," he proclaimed. "I appeal to the interests and am

content to rely on the judgment formed by the East India Company, the traders with Australia, Singapore, Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay, the merchants of the City, the shipowners of London and Liverpool, the manufacturers of Manchester, the ironmasters, the makers of machinery, the P. and O. Steam Company, the managers of banks and other large businesses, the commercial associations, and the owners of the coal mines who in 1854 exported nearly four and a half million tons of coal, representing a value of £2,147,156, and who, by the opening of the Suez Canal, would find these enormous exports considerably increased." Ah! he was clever, this De Lesseps.

Theoretically, there could be no question of the value of a Suez Canal. But was the scheme practicable? That is what De Lesseps was asked again and again. Eminent engineers had openly declared that the project was doomed to failure, and the whole pack which loved a cheap laugh followed at their heels. He must establish confidence, and stop the mouths of these people, else divided counsels would quickly dampen the enthusiasm of those who were prepared to support him. The feasibility of the enterprise must be established beyond all cavil. Very well, it would be submitted to an impartial Commission selected from among the most celebrated engineers in Europe.

At De Lesseps' Paris residence in the Rue Richepanse the members of the Commission gathered in October, 1855. From Austria they came, from Italy, Spain, Holland, Prussia, France, England and Egypt, men whose names stood high in their profession. So keen were these representatives that they one and all refused

payment even of their travelling expenses. The Commission duly appointed a sub-committee to proceed to Egypt and study the scheme on the spot. Mohammed Said generously undertook to defray the whole cost of the survey amounting to £12,000. The members appointed set out at once and spent six weeks on their investigations. On January 1st, 1856, they returned to Alexandria, where the Viceroy eagerly awaited them at the gates of his palace. When he heard from their own lips that they considered the canal possible, he could not restrain himself and jubilantly embraced De Lesseps.

The Commissioners immediately drew up a statement in which they said: "Our investigation has revealed to us innumerable obstacles, not to say impossibilities, for taking the route by Alexandria, and unexpected facilities for establishing a port in the Gulf of Pelusium. The direct canal from Suez to the Gulf of Pelusium is therefore the sole solution of the problem for joining the Red Sea to the Mediterranean; the execution of the work is easy, and the success is assured."

At once a copy of the draft report was circulated to the principal supporters of the scheme, and De Lesseps himself followed close behind it to make a fresh assault on the British Government and those who had opposed him. This time he was on surer ground: he was armed with the potent weapon of the Commission's findings, the definitive Act of Concession, and the Statutes of the Company which it was proposed to form. While in Paris, on the way to London, he again saw Lord Clarendon and had a long conversation with him. The

Foreign Secretary was duly impressed with the important progress that had been made in so short a time, and held out hopes of an understanding. "Please repeat to Lord Palmerston the substance of our conversation," he said. "We can discuss the matter together again, for we shall meet in London in a few days." Lord Clarendon made it clear once more that the British objections were political. Britain felt that the cutting of the canal would give Egypt such importance that it would sever its associations with Turkey, which eventuality must by all means be prevented. From the commercial aspect he could well see that Britain would be the greatest beneficiary.

The argument that it was in the interest of England to oppose the scheme was not now urged as it had been before. Now it was England's solicitude for the integrity of the Ottoman Empire. "This tactic," De Lesseps remarked, "shows that the enemy of the canal is driven to his last entrenchment, and I am going to prepare my parallels and pursue with prudence, but with more perseverance and vigour than before, my appeal to public opinion in England. One campaign the more will not discourage me, and in the meantime the matter will ripen and assume a consistent shape, which will add to our force."

Lord Palmerston, however, was personally just where he had been before. Another interview with him was equally a failure. He was still firmly convinced that France had long been pursuing a machiavellian policy in Egypt against England. The Suez Canal was all a part of France's sinister designs. At the same time he persisted in maintaining that the execution of the

canal was physically impossible, even if all the engineers of Europe expressed themselves to the contrary. Finally, he declared that he would continue to oppose the enterprise without any sort of reticence. De Lesseps could not help asking himself whether he was in the presence of a statesman or a maniac.

With English public opinion the enterprise had gained rapidly in popularity. The Commission's report was having its effect. De Lesseps was presented to Queen Victoria, and had a long conversation with Prince Albert, who took him to his study and asked for the fullest information. Then the Royal Geographical Society entertained him to dinner at its club, and he afterwards addressed the Society at a crowded meeting, which received his remarks with loud applause.

A sidelight on the situation is provided by the action of Mr. Wyld, Geographer to the Queen, and owner of the "Great Globe" in Leicester Square, who gave an ocular demonstration three times daily of the advantages which navigation will derive from passing through the Isthmus of Suez instead of going round by the Cape.

Having sown this further seed, De Lesseps left again for Egypt to report progress to the Viceroy. But on his way he had an important interview with Prince Metternich, which greatly strengthened his hand. The doyen of European statesmen gave his ruling on the political aspect of the question in no uncertain terms.

"His Highness the Viceroy had the right to decree the making of the Suez Canal. All the measures taken by him merit the assent of the statesmen of Europe;

but in a question of this importance, on which it was to be expected that foreign policy would have something to say, he was well advised in applying for the ratification of the Porte.

“The official approval of an enterprise so manifestly beneficial to the interests of the Ottoman Empire, as to those of all other nations, cannot fail to be given, now that science has pronounced in its favour, and that sufficient capital is ready to carry it out.

“Admitting, then, that the Sultan, to begin with, is with one accord with his vassal, the Viceroy will place himself in a very favourable position as regards Europe, if, in order to prevent any further difficulties between the friendly Powers themselves or with Egypt, he asks the former to designate plenipotentiaries to Constantinople for the purpose of regulating by means of a convention the perpetual neutrality of the passage through the Suez Canal, the principle of which, in so far as regards the Ottoman Empire, is already set forth in Clause 14 of the Act of Concession.

“In this way the internal question of the execution of the canal is kept separate, as it should be, from the external question of neutrality. The prerogatives of the territorial sovereignty remain intact, and the Ottoman Empire, assuming for the first time since the conclusion of peace the influential position which it has a right to occupy in a negotiation of public European law, satisfies the political and commercial interests of all the Powers, while it at the same time obtains, by their accession, a fresh guarantee of its integrity and independence.

“The Viceroy of Egypt, who has so faithfully

served his Suzerain during the war, will have rendered, by his conduct in regard to a work of peace, a not less signal service, and thus will be fulfilled the prediction of Napoleon I at the beginning of the century, that the execution of the canal from sea to sea would contribute to the glory and to the maintenance of the Ottoman Empire."

This clear and noble utterance was bound to carry weight in all the European capitals. It began to appear that the British Government was taking up a dog in the manger attitude, which was inexcusable. De Lesseps' cause had now become a war of justice, reason and humanity against pettiness and insular self-esteem.

De Lesseps himself hit out straight from the shoulder in a letter to Richard Cobden dated from Cairo, November 22nd, 1856. "How can it be imagined," he said, "that people on the Continent will believe in the sincerity of England, in her zeal for universal progress, civilisation, and public wealth, if it is seen that England, where public opinion reigns supreme, allows her Government to continue its incredible opposition to the Suez Canal, a private enterprise, in the origin, constitution, and object of which there is nothing to awaken any suspicion of political rivalry? How can the apostles of free trade and open competition propagate their doctrines when the two leading members of the Cabinet, who recently figured in their ranks, will not agree, through fear or horror of competition, to the suppression of a narrow neck of land which divides the two most opulent of seas, and stands as a feeble barrier against all the navies of the globe?"

During the winter of 1856—1857 De Lesseps visited the Sudan in the train of the Viceroy; but in the spring he returned once more to London.

Now more than ever before he had the merchants, bankers and shipowners on his side. In April, May and June he conducted a whirlwind campaign in the principal towns of England, Scotland and Ireland, collecting signatures, declarations and resolutions. He would show the Government decisively that a tide was rising in Britain that would swamp their antiquated opposition. The proceedings at a public meeting held at the London Tavern on June 24th are typical of the results obtained. Sir James Duke, Bt., was in the chair. "It was proposed by Mr. Arbuthnot and seconded by Captain Harris, of the P. and O. Steam Company, 'The canal through the isthmus of Suez having been declared practicable by competent engineers, and all nations having been invited to take part in the enterprise, which will not be placed under the exclusive protection of any government in particular, this meeting, being quite satisfied with the explanations given by M. de Lesseps, is persuaded that the success of the canal will be eminently advantageous to the commercial interests of Great Britain.' Carried unanimously."

The accounts of all the meetings, beginning with that at Liverpool on April 29th down to this last at London, were forthwith published in pamphlet form, dedicated to the members of the Houses of Parliament. In his introductory remarks to this formidable dossier of British opinion De Lesseps appealed "in all confidence, in order to put an end to the opposition of the British Ambassador at Constantinople, to the political bodies

of a free country which, in other circumstances, have already had the glory of placing above every consideration of private interests or national rivalry the great principles of civilisation and free trade."

One cannot help but be amazed at the effective manner in which this Frenchman, this foreigner, almost single-handed had won sober and conservative Britain to his back. He had come to these islands two years before with a few introductions and knowing hardly a soul. Handicapped by his nationality and his slight knowledge of the language, and faced with the most powerful and active hostility in high places, the scoffing of men of science and the jeers of the Press, he had in this period completely turned the tables. If an Englishman had brought about this revolution it would have been a phenomenal achievement; for an alien it was hardly less than miraculous. By brilliant generalship, the fervour of a revivalist, and the quintessence of diplomacy, he had routed the scientists, converted the Press, enlisted the industrialists, and roused the whole nation behind him. His campaign had been conducted with masterly skill. His energy was prodigious: his faith fanatical. Step by step he had proceeded, admitting no discouragement, supported by the righteousness and humanity of his cause, using every setback to consolidate his position for a further drive forward. A lesser man would have been daunted by the formidable odds against him, and have long ago given up the struggle. But not De Lesseps. On he went, winning great victories of the mind and spirit. It is an epic story. Now he had organised his forces. No longer did he stand alone. He was the spearhead

of a mighty army directly threatening Westminster itself. Inevitably he must conquer.

In the House of Commons on July 7th, 1857, Mr. Henry Berkeley, the member for Bristol, rose to ask the First Lord of the Treasury "whether Her Majesty's Government would use its influence with His Highness the Sultan in support of an application which had been made by the Viceroy of Egypt for the sanction of the Sublime Porte to the construction of a ship canal across the Isthmus of Suez, for which a concession had been granted by the Viceroy to M. Ferdinand de Lesseps, and which had received the approbation of the principal cities, ports, and commercial towns of the United Kingdom; and if any objection were entertained by Her Majesty's Government to the undertaking, to state the grounds of such objection."

Lord Palmerston was beleaguered, but he still held out with a kind of reckless bravado. His answer was both irritating and insulting, and hardly raised a laugh or a "hear, hear" even from the Government benches.

"Her Majesty's Government certainly cannot undertake to use their influence with the Sultan to induce him to give permission for the construction of this canal, because for the last fifteen years Her Majesty's Government have used all the influence they possess at Constantinople and in Egypt, to prevent that scheme from being carried into execution. It is an undertaking which, I believe, as regards its commercial character, may be deemed to rank among the many bubble schemes that from time to time have been palmed off upon gullible capitalists. I believe that it is physically impracticable, except at an expense which would be

far too great to warrant the expectation of any returns. I believe, therefore, that those who embarked their money in any such undertaking (if my hon. friend has any constituents who are likely to do so) would find themselves very grievously deceived by the result.

“ However, this is not the ground upon which the Government have opposed the scheme. Private individuals are left to take care of their own interests, and if they embark in impracticable undertakings, they must pay the penalty for so doing. But the scheme is one hostile to the interests of this country—opposed to the standing policy of England in regard to the connection of Egypt with Turkey—a policy which has been supported by the war and the Treaty of Paris. The obvious political tendency of the undertaking is to render more easy the separation of Egypt from Turkey. It is founded also on remote speculations with regard to easier access to our Indian possessions, which I need not more distinctly shadow forth, because they will be obvious to anybody who pays attention to the subject.

“ I can only express my surprise that M. Ferdinand de Lesseps should have reckoned so much on the credulity of English capitalists, as to think that by his progress through the different counties he should succeed in obtaining English money for the promotion of a scheme which is in every way so adverse to British interests. That scheme was launched, I believe, about fifteen years ago, as a rival to the railway from Alexandria by Cairo to Suez, which, being infinitely more practicable and likely to be more useful, obtained the pre-eminence; but probably the object which M. de Lesseps and some of the promoters have in view

will be accomplished, even if the whole of the undertaking should not be carried into execution. If my hon. friend the member for Bristol will take my advice, he will have nothing to do with the scheme in question."

There may have been some foresight in Lord Palmerston's belief that the existence of the Suez Canal would lead eventually to a severance of connections between Egypt and Turkey; but the intemperate language that he chose to use cannot too strongly be reprehended. It was personally grossly insulting to M. de Lesseps, a national of a friendly Power, to say nothing more, and held him up in the eyes of the world as a plausible swindler and charlatan. Such a public statement could not go unanswered, and De Lesseps lost no time in challenging the Prime Minister's remarks in a letter addressed to the members of the Chambers of Commerce and of the Commercial Associations of Great Britain, which, in the circumstances, was marked by extreme moderation. He did, however, point out that so far from Turkey believing that the canal was to her detriment, the British Government through their Ambassador at Constantinople had had to bring the greatest pressure to bear on the Sultan to prevent him from ratifying the concession.

Lord Palmerston had not the grace to modify his strictures in a subsequent speech; but with a fine indifference went on to aggravate the situation in even more offensive language. "I do not think, therefore, that I am wrong in saying that the project is one of those chimeras so often formed to induce English capitalists to part with their money, the end being that

these schemes leave them poorer, though they may make others much richer."

De Lesseps could hardly challenge the Prime Minister in defence of his honour, but he could challenge Robert Stephenson, now a Member of Parliament, for saying "I agree with the First Lord of the Treasury."

"I ask you, sir, for a written explanation of what you mean, either furnished by yourself or by two of your friends, whom you will please put in communication with me. I do not doubt that you will at once give me these explanations. I have come over from France on purpose to ask you for them. I have the honour, sir, to place myself at your disposal."

Stephenson replied the next day: "Nothing could be further from my intention, in speaking of the Suez Canal the other night in the House of Commons, than to make a single remark that could be construed as having any personal allusion to yourself, and I am confident no one who heard me could regard what I said as having any such bearing. When I said that I concurred with Lord Palmerston's opinion, I referred to his statement that money might overcome almost any physical difficulties, however great, and that the undertaking, if ever finished, would not be commercially advantageous. The first study which I made of the subject, in 1847, led me to this opinion, and nothing which has come to my knowledge since that period has tended to alter my view."

The Prime Minister's declarations far from strengthening the position of the Government had only alienated public sympathy from him. On every hand

there was open condemnation of his attitude. He had revealed himself as a kind of Pharaoh of the Oppression, hardening his heart against the prophet of freedom. It was not now a case of crossing the Red Sea on dry land, but of reaching it by water. Nevertheless it required a great plague to bring at least some British statesmen to their senses. This plague was the Indian Mutiny.

In 1856, Lord Canning, on the point of leaving for India to succeed the Marquis of Dalhousie as Governor-General, used these prophetic words at a farewell banquet given in his honour by the Court of Directors of the Hon. East India Company. "I wish for a peaceful term of office. But I cannot forget that in the sky of India, serene as it is, a small cloud may arise, no larger than a man's hand, but which, growing larger and larger, may at last threaten to burst and overwhelm us with ruin."

In May, 1857, the Indian rebellion broke out with the mutiny of the Sepoys at Meerut, and soon all the valley of the Ganges from Patna to Delhi was aflame.

It was found necessary to send troops from England by the overland route to Suez in order to expedite their arrival in India. Referring to this the *Daily News* of October 2nd, 1857, said: "Thus the English Government admits that the Suez route is the best for communication with India, and after stubborn resistance, broken down by necessity, resolves to send by this route some of the troops which are being despatched to the relief of our gallant soldiers in India. Nothing could be a more complete avowal of the utility of M. de Lesseps' scheme; and this action of the Government is

the implicit condemnation of Lord Palmerston and Lord Stratford de Redcliffe, who have hitherto opposed the scheme. It would seem as if Providence had set itself to inflict upon them the chastisement which they deserve, by making them, so to speak, responsible before public opinion for the difficulties which their country is experiencing in putting an end to the calamities which are so preying upon its interests, its affections, and its power. . . . Lord Palmerston and Lord Stratford de Redcliffe have not seen or foreseen anything of this. . . . Lulled by a false sense of security, they have yielded to their inclination for making themselves disagreeable to others."

But the end of British Government opposition was not yet. On several occasions during the next year both under Lord Palmerston's and Lord Derby's administrations the subject was brought before Parliament. There was even a full-dress debate in the House on June 1st, 1858, when sixty-two members voted in support of Mr. Roebuck's motion in favour of the canal. Royalty also discussed the Suez Canal project. During the visit of the Emperor Napoleon and his consort to Queen Victoria at Osborne a special conference was held attended by Lord Palmerston and Count Walewski. The decision reached was that both France and Britain should maintain a neutral attitude. But that was just what the British Government had no intention of doing, and had not done all along. The pressure on the Sultan to disown the scheme was continued and, if possible, intensified, so that it seemed as if the Porte was a vassal of England, and that England's consent was necessary before Turkey could

ratify the firman of concession given by the Viceroy of Egypt.

De Lesseps, however, held on his course undaunted and determined to bring his Company into operation. Writing from Constantinople in April, 1858, he said: "We have to prove that the so-called chimera is a reality. . . . To avoid all misunderstandings in an affair which should retain its general and commercial character, the Company will not ask for the assistance of any of the governments of whose support it was assured. But it is about to organise itself in a definite form; it will march resolutely forward and complete its work, backed up by the investments of its shareholders of all nations, and by the public opinion of the whole world. The Scientific Commission will meet about the end of June, and its report will settle the conditions under which the works are to be executed, in order to open the first section of the canal. A temporary board of administration will then decide how much capital is to be issued; the shareholders will receive intimation of when they are to pay their calls, and every arrangement will be made, so that by the end of the year the work may be put thoroughly into hand, and carried on without interruption."

Beneath the surface it had been recognisable all along that the British Government's hostility to the enterprise was in reality hostility to France. Palmerston had never disguised his suspicions of French policy, and such evident unfriendliness towards a great ally could only be viewed with alarm at Paris. While the Imperial Government was most cautious and careful to give no grounds for offence by making the Suez Canal

a French political issue, popular feeling against England could not be checked. The old animosities were not dead, but their slumber was fitfully broken.

De Lesseps, whose wonderful sense of humour never deserted him in all his trial and difficulties, throws an amusing sidelight on the situation in a lecture which he once gave before the *Société des Gens de Lettres*. His remarks provide a welcome relief at the end of a painful chapter.

It had been suggested to him that he should open his subscription lists at the French banking house of Rothschild's. "I had rendered M. de Rothschild some services while Minister at Madrid, and he was good enough to recognise them.

"'If you wish it,' he said, 'I will open your subscription at my offices.'

"'And what will you ask me for it?' I answered, enchanted.

"'Good Heavens! It is plain you are not a man of business. It is always five per cent.'

"'Five per cent. on two hundred millions (£8,000,000); why, that makes ten millions! (£400,000). I shall hire a place for 1,200 francs, and do my own work equally well.'

"Well, the Grand Central had just left the Place Vendôme. There I established my offices, and thither the capital flowed in abundance.

"By the advice of the Viceroy, I had reserved for foreign Powers a portion of the shares. But France alone took of the whole amount 220,000, the equivalent of 110,000,000 francs (£4,400,000).

"I witnessed in the course of the subscription some

curious facts full of patriotism. Two persons in particular wished to subscribe. One was an old bald-headed priest, doubtless an old soldier, who said to me:

“‘Oh, those English! I am glad to be able to be revenged on them by taking shares in the Suez Canal.’

“The other who came to my office was a well-dressed man, I know not of what profession.

“‘I wish,’ said he, ‘to subscribe for the railway of the island of Sweden.’

“‘But,’ he was told, ‘it is not a railway, it is a canal; it is not an island, it is an isthmus; it is not in Sweden, it is at Suez.’

“‘That’s all the same to me,’ he replied. ‘Provided it be against the English, I subscribe.’”

CHAPTER IV

FROM SEA TO SEA

THE story of this chapter, which covers the years 1859 to 1869, is one of incessant struggle terminating in a glorious victory. Those years were occupied with the actual construction of the Suez Canal.

It was on April 25th, 1859, that Ferdinand de Lesseps, surrounded by a staff of employees and workmen of the Company, together with the engineers Mougel Bey, De Monant, Laroche and Larouse, gave the first blow with the pickaxe, and shovelled the first spadeful of sandy soil on the Pelusian shore of the Mediterranean which was to be the northern terminus of the canal. On this site would hereafter arise the new town of Port Said, commemorating the work of the Prince, who, against every effort at intimidation, had stood firmly by the great scheme which he had sponsored. "People are mistaken in Europe," Mohammed Said had told the English Consul-General, "if they attribute the piercing of the isthmus to M. de Lesseps alone, for I am the promoter of it. M. de Lesseps has merely carried out my instructions. You will ask me perhaps what my motive has been, and I will tell you that it has been to bring honour on my name and serve at the same time the interests of the Ottoman Empire. I have acquired by this means the sympathies of all the nations of Europe."

"All but England," reminded the Consul, significantly.

England officially was still adamant; but the Viceroy would not turn back.

Hitherto De Lesseps had fought his own battles backed only by the active goodwill of the Viceroy. Now he felt that France must abandon her passive attitude. England had persistently broken the agreement of neutrality, so that France was fully entitled to give more than moral support. The Empress Eugénie, herself related to De Lesseps, had given him continuous sympathy and her advocacy with the Emperor. It was to her therefore that he appealed through her private secretary.

"The intervention of the Emperor, which now becomes a question of life and death for us, will certainly increase his popularity at home and his influence abroad. All the governments are ready to support him against the isolated opposition of the antiquated policy of England. . . . I said at the last meeting of our board that the Empress had been our guardian angel, and that she would be for the union of the two seas what Isabella, the Catholic, was for the discovery of America. We have therefore chosen the 15th of November, the feast of St. Eugénie, for our first general meeting of shareholders."

The result of this letter was an audience with the Emperor. The interview was indeed a vital one, for a critical situation had arisen. Alarmed that construction had actually begun, the British Government had so worked upon the Porte that a formal order from the Sultan had been sent requiring all operations to cease

forthwith. The Viceroy was in a quandary, especially as M. Sabatier, the French Consul-General, anxious to avoid political complications, agreed that the order must be obeyed. Laroche, De Lesseps' chief engineer at Port Said, protested vigorously, and flatly refused to abandon the excavations. The French Consul insisted; but still Laroche held out, and wrote off urgently to his chief. Everything clearly depended on the attitude of the Emperor, whose vacillating qualities were too well known.

A deputation from the Company arrived at St. Cloud. The Emperor addressed himself immediately to De Lesseps. "How is it, M. de Lesseps, that so many people are against your enterprise?"

"Sire," he responded readily, "it is because they think that Your Majesty will not stand by us."

The Emperor twisted the tips of his moustache meditatively. "Well," he said, after a pause. "Do not be uneasy. You may count on my assistance and protection." He then gave his consent to a statement being made to the shareholders that the meeting of the Company would be adjourned as negotiations were in progress. The deputation, thanking him, thereupon presented a formal complaint against the French Consul-General in Egypt, who had so lamentably failed to protect the Company's interests, and prepared to retire. But before they did so De Lesseps observed that he thought it desirable that he should go immediately to Constantinople and Alexandria. To this the Emperor replied: "It is very important that you should do so."

When the deputation retired it was evident that the

Emperor wished to speak less formally to De Lesseps and the Duc d'Albuféra, a Vice-President of the Company, so they remained behind.

"What do you think we should do now?" asked Napoleon.

"Your Majesty," De Lesseps answered, "I think it would be wise to recall the French Consul-General, who, being a man of great capacity, could be sent to some other post."

"If that is all," said the Emperor, "it is easily done. You can tell Walewski so."

That was the end of that crisis. The Egyptian Government called off its ultimatum, and the tense situation at Cairo was relieved. But other efforts were made to render the undertaking abortive. The British campaign went on, mercilessly, remorselessly. But so did the work on the canal go on. The forced labour employed on the diggings was made an issue. Again a cessation of operations seemed inevitable. But again De Lesseps showed British interference in its true colours. By November 18th, 1862, the waters of the Mediterranean flowed as far as Lake Timsah.

That was a great day, and De Lesseps with his distinctly oriental love for picturesque ceremonial saw to it that the celebrations were worthy of the occasion. A stand hung with bunting accommodated distinguished guests, among whom were to be seen the engineers, the Grand Mufti of Egypt and the Catholic Bishop. Along the canal embankments were lined up thousands of workmen. Every eye was directed towards the narrow ridge of sand, which was the only obstacle separating water from water. At a given signal

the last blows were struck, and as the waters burst their way through, De Lesseps cried in ringing tones: "In the name of His Highness, Mohammed Said, I command that the waters of the Mediterranean enter Lake Timsah, by the grace of God!"

Congratulations showered on the happy inspirer of the great scheme, who had fought so indomitably for its realisation. The Empress Eugénie sent him her greetings, while the Emperor elevated him to be a Commander of the Legion of Honour.

We turn now to another side of the picture which throws light on De Lesseps' marvellous personal influence and strength of character. It was many years later, when he had been elected a member of the French Academy. Ernest Renan, the Director, in his magnificent oratorical address harked back to those days when the canal was in the making. We cannot forbear from making a somewhat lengthy quotation of his remarks, for he had been an eyewitness of some of the scenes which he describes.

"Your ascendancy over that world so strangely endowed with rough-and-ready energy was something incredible. You astonished M. Barthélemy St. Hilaire, who could follow you at last no longer. You were, in short, a king, and you enjoyed the advantages of sovereignty, and learnt the great lesson which it teaches, that of indulgence, pity, pardon and disdain. I have seen myself your kingdom in the desert. When crossing the Ouadi from Zagazig to Ismailia, you gave me as guide one of your subjects. He was, I believe, an ex-brigand whom

you had for a time attached to the cause of order. While explaining to me the way to handle an old sixteenth-century musket, which formed part of his armament, he unbosomed himself to me of his inmost sentiments, which may be summed up in unbounded admiration for you. You had your faithful disciples—I was almost going to say fanatics—in the camp of those who might be regarded as your enemies. At Ismailia we met an English lady who was watching very intently the progress of your workmen to see whether the prophecies of the Bible were not being confirmed. She took us to see some tufts of grass and flowers which the infiltrations of the sweet-water canal had caused to spring up on the sand. This seemed conclusive to her, for was it not written in the 35th chapter of Isaiah that, before the coming of the Messiah, 'the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose'? You had some fancy ready to suit every one's taste, and supplied them all with a dream after their own heart.

"The word religion is not too strong to express the enthusiasm which you excited. Your work was for several years a sort of gospel of redemption, an era of grace and pardon. The idea of rehabilitation and moral amnesty always occupies a large place in the origin of religions. The brigand is grateful to whomsoever comes to preach a jubilee which has the effect of creating a new departure. You were kind to those who came and offered their services. You made them feel that their past would be wiped out, that their offences would be absolved, and that they would begin their moral life anew if they were

in earnest to help you to pierce the Isthmus. There are so many people ready to amend their ways if only one will pass the sponge over some incident in their career. Upon one occasion, a whole troop of convicts who had escaped from some prison on the shores of the Adriatic swooped down upon the Isthmus as upon a land of promise. The Austrian Consul demanded their surrender, but you spun out the negotiations, and in a few weeks' time the consul was busily employed in forwarding the money which these worthy fellows wanted to send home to their poor relations, perhaps to their victims. The consul thereupon begged you to keep them, as you had succeeded in turning them to such excellent account. In a report of one of your lectures, I remember reading: 'M. de Lesseps stated that men are trustworthy and not at all evilly disposed when they have enough to live upon. Man only becomes evil through hunger or fear.' We should perhaps add: 'or when he is jealous.' You went on to say: 'I have never had to complain of my workmen, and yet I have employed pirates and convicts. Work has made honest men again of them all; I have never been robbed even of a pocket-handkerchief. The truth is that our men can be got to do anything by showing them esteem and by persuading them that they are engaged upon a work of world-wide interest.'

"... It is all this, sir, that in electing you we were anxious to recompense. We are incompetent to appreciate the work of the engineer; the merits of the administrator, the financier, and the diplomatist are not for us to discuss; but we have been struck

by the moral grandeur of the work, by this resurrection of the faith, not the faith in any particular dogma, but the faith in humanity and its brilliant destinies. . . . Your glory consists in having set stirring this latest movement of enthusiasm, this latest manifestation of self-devotion. You have renewed in our time the miracles of ancient days. You possess in the highest degree the secret of all greatness, the art of making yourself beloved. . . . Thousands of men have found in you their conscience, their reason of being, their principle of nobility or of moral renovation."

The idealist revealed by this glowing tribute, even when we have discounted much of its professional rhetoric, is very warming. Almost had we lost sight of De Lesseps the man in the maze of international intrigues and complications. We had seen a great deal of the engineer, the administrator, the financier, and the diplomatist. It is good to be reminded that the simple, genial, humane soul, whom we know in the earlier years, still persisted in spite of every adverse circumstance that might have changed, hardened, and embittered him. Achieve what he might, surely the greatest achievement was that of making himself beloved. That held good supremely in his own family circle. We have thought insufficiently of him as a father. The fate of the De Lesseps in each generation seemed to be away from home and kindred for long years at a time. Yet the most intimate ties were never forgotten, and there are letters remaining which prove how tenderly even at a distance this greatest of

his name watched over his dear ones, and sought to train up his sons as unaffected and honourable gentlemen. Charles was now eighteen and already gave promise of realising to the fullest extent his father's desires for him. Between the two there was a bond of true affection, how true we shall have ample opportunity of judging hereafter.

Just now we are afforded one glimpse of the loving nature of the man whose life-story we are chronicling. It is January, 1863. A telegram had arrived at the workings with grave news. Mohammed Said was dying. De Lesseps must hasten if he would see his friend alive. A horse was saddled at once for a rapid night ride across the desert with only the north star as guide. But at Tel-el-Kebir he learned that the Viceroy had already passed away. "I am grieved to the heart," he writes in his journal, "not on account of my enterprise, in which I have the most serene confidence, despite all the difficulties which may arise, but because of the cruel separation from a faithful friend who for more than a quarter of a century has given me so many proofs of affection and confidence. As I travel on to Alexandria, I go over in my mind all the circumstances connected with our youthful friendship, his careless and easy life as a young man, and his beneficent reign." Arrived at his destination, De Lesseps craved permission to enter the family mosque where the Viceroy's body lay awaiting burial. Leave was granted him, and there in the shadows he spent an hour alone, paying a last homage, prostrate, his head resting on the dead man's turban.

For the safety of his enterprise De Lesseps was

quickly assured by the new ruler, Ismail Pasha, youngest son of Mohammed Ali, who told him directly, "I should not be worthy to be Viceroy of Egypt, if I was not even more of a 'canalist' than you are."

Nevertheless, De Lesseps had still to strike a blow in defence of his project. Another ultimatum came from Constantinople. It was demanded that the Company should surrender the territory granted to it under the Concession on either side of the canal, and also that which embraced the sweet-water canal leading into it. At the same time the forced labour was to be abolished, the number of native labourers being reduced to six thousand. For a while there was consternation. The Company's shares slumped, and it seemed that even now the end would be failure. Urgently, the Emperor Napoleon was asked to arbitrate on behalf of the Company. For four months a Commission sat to deal with the problem, and in the end a mutually satisfactory settlement was reached, whereby, in yielding to the demands made upon it the Company would receive a large cash indemnity from the Egyptian Government payable over a period of years and amounting to more than three million pounds.

The attacks which had been made again and again on the Company had won over the Emperor to give his unqualified support to the scheme. They touched too nearly the honour and dignity of France. In April, 1865, when he was about to embark on his yacht, the *Aigle*, on his way from Marseilles to Algeria, the Turkish Grand Vizier Fuad Pasha was among those present at his departure. The Emperor declined to respond to his bow and studiously ignored him. Fuad

could not help but inquire whether His Imperial Majesty had any cause of complaint against him or his Government. The only answer he received was an expressive gesture accompanying the single word "Firman."

It was enough. The Porte's confirmation of the Concession, as now amended by the terms of arbitration, was not delayed much longer. The official ratification was delivered on February 22nd, 1866. By that time, thanks to De Lesseps' own perseverance in his undertaking, it had ceased to have any real value so far as it affected the actual construction of the canal. It did, however, place the enterprise at last beyond the reach of scheming politicians. England finally had to admit that the Suez Canal would soon be an accomplished fact. There was no more talk of chimeras. The only concern now was that the canal should be rendered permanently neutral in time of war. This, however, was not fully secured until the Convention of 1888.

The day fixed for the opening of the Suez Canal was November 17th, 1869. It was to be made an occasion worthy of the stature of the undertaking, and of its international character. Yet to the very last anxiety persisted as to whether all would be well. While preparations on a gigantic scale to receive and entertain the crowds of distinguished visitors were proceeding at Port Said, Ismailia, and Suez, soundings were being taken along the whole length of the canal to ensure that the passage would be made in safety. Suddenly it was discovered by one of the engineers that

through some mischance a spike of rock in the very middle of the canal had been overlooked, which would inevitably have pierced the first vessel that came along. There was consternation. Could the obstacle be removed in time? De Lesseps would not hear of any postponement. The rock must be blasted away. Night and day without intermission the workmen laboured on the mining operations, and only two days before the opening ceremony the channel was freed.

Invitations had been issued broadcast by the Viceroy, and in addition thousands of visitors flocked from all parts of the world to witness the momentous celebration. It is estimated that more than six thousand persons attended, apart from natives, workmen, the special staff, and the sailors manning the vessels. Among the Viceroy's guests were the Empress Eugénie, the Emperor of Austria, the Crown Prince of Prussia, the Crown Prince of Holland, Prince William of Hesse, and many other notables and diplomatic representatives.

On November 16th, Port Said roads were crowded with the craft of all nations, yachts, warships, steamers, boats and sailing vessels of all descriptions. Every mast was beflagged, every deck gay with sightseers. Rain had fallen for several days previously; but on this day of days the sun shone brightly out of a clear sky, and the deep blue waters of the Mediterranean reflected the resplendent colours of flag and ensign. "On the Quai Eugénie a carpeted platform had been erected to a height of fifteen feet, covered with a canopy, and decorated with the ensigns of all nations; and nearer the shore were two more platforms, tastefully decorated

with flags. Amongst them were the banners of the Moslem—the Crescent and Star—and of the Cross, the last being surrounded by the flags of Christendom."

At eleven o'clock, greeted by the thunderous salutes of the anchored warships and the Egyptian shore batteries, and by the hootings of steamship sirens, the French Imperial yacht the *Aigle*, with the Empress on board, moved slowly forward, while the National Anthem of France could be heard amidst the din of gunfire and cheers. "Never have I seen a sight so lovely!" exclaimed Eugénie, her eyes filled with tears. Awaiting her on the larger platform was Ismail Pasha, his uniform glittering with stars and orders. Presently the distinguished company was grouped around the Viceroy and the proceedings commenced with a religious ceremony. The venerable Sheikh of Islam intoned a prayer, and then the Grand Ulema read a discourse in Arabic. They were followed by the Christian clergy, headed by the Archbishop of Alexandria, and Monseigneur Bauer, Almoner to the Empress. Then the latter stood forward and gave an eloquent address. "A very charming passage was devoted to the man to whom so much was due, whose genius, fortitude, and almost superhuman energy, contending against innumerable obstacles, had carried him through years of difficulty and toil to such a glorious end. The speaker compared him to Christopher Columbus, and said that his name would be henceforth inscribed among the names of those who had, like the Genoese navigator, conferred inestimable benefits on mankind; and, in conclusion, he made a most feeling and tender allusion to those who had

fallen, in the course of the work, victims in the campaign of civilisation, who had given their lives to the accomplishment of that for which ages to come would bless them." At the termination of the address the trumpets sounded, the guns boomed, and resounding cheers echoed around the harbour.

The evening was given up to festivities. The harbour and the shipping were brightly illuminated. Fireworks cascaded a golden rain on the flashing waters. Balls were given on shore and afloat.

But in the night watches, when all had at last retired to rest, grave news was brought to De Lesseps. An Egyptian frigate approaching Ismailia had grounded, and swung broadside across the canal blocking it completely. Every effort to refloat her had been unsuccessful. At three o'clock in the morning De Lesseps was closeted with the Viceroy. He hardly dared to put his request into words. But the Viceroy understood, and gave orders that if the vessel could not be got off she was to be blown up. De Lesseps embraced him. Fortunately this drastic action was unnecessary, as in the meantime a troop of Egyptian marines sent to the spot had managed to get the frigate clear. This was at five o'clock in the morning. It had been touch and go whether after all had been done triumph would end in tragedy. A little later—an undeserved gesture to dilatory and hostile Britain—Captain Willoughby's small steamer, the *Prompt*, was allowed to pass through the canal to await the arrival of the official procession of vessels.

At eight o'clock on the morning of Wednesday, November 17th, the Imperial yacht the *Aigle* led a

long column of shipping into the canal. At the same time a flotilla of Egyptian warships moved in from the Red Sea end to meet them at Ismailia. The passage of over forty miles to Lake Timsah occupied twelve hours, and was accomplished without any untoward incident. De Lesseps tells us that the Empress Eugénie afterwards confessed to him that "during the whole journey she had felt as though a circle of fire was round her head, because every moment she thought she saw the *Aigle* stop short, the honour of the French flag compromised, and the fruit of our labours lost. Suffocated by emotion, she was obliged to leave the table, and we overheard her sobs—sobs which do her honour, for it was French patriotism overflowing from her heart."

When at sunset the two fleets made contact amidst cheers and acclamations, establishing the union of the two seas, the hero of the whole undertaking was fast asleep, worn out with the vigil of the previous night.

The next day a further stretch of the canal was successfully negotiated, and in the course of it the Empress conferred on De Lesseps the insignia of Grand Officer of the Legion of Honour. After a night at anchor in the Bitter Lakes the procession steamed onwards to Port Suez, which was reached at eleven o'clock in the morning of November 20th. "The canal has been traversed from end to end without hindrance," wrote the Paris *Official Journal*, "and the Imperial yacht *Aigle*, after a splendid passage, now lies at her moorings in the Red Sea. Thus are realised the great hopes which were entertained of this mighty undertaking, the joining of the two seas."

Among those present on the great occasion, was a

young Creole lady of English extraction, Mlle. Louise-Hélène Autard de Bragard. On November 25th, at Ismailia, she became the second wife of Ferdinand de Lesseps, who had been a widower for fifteen years. The two surviving sons of his former marriage were there to wish him happiness.

Happiness indeed had come to him after all his trials, and not the least was when riding along the canal embankment he saw a merchant ship approaching. It was the steamer *Danube*, commanded by Capt. Charles Mann, returning to Europe from India by the new route.

CHAPTER V

POSTSCRIPT TO SUEZ

FOR De Lesseps the months that followed the successful opening of the Suez Canal were arduous in the extreme. All the world had combined to do him honour. Country after country rewarded him with dignities. There seemed to be no end to the banquets he was expected to attend, and the speeches he was called upon to make. Genially, this old-young man of sixty-five responded to as many of the demands of his well-wishers as time would allow; but we have only space to follow him in his royal progress through England. Of all the homage that he received, surely the most gratifying was that which came from the country and government which had been responsible for all his difficulties, ruthlessly obstructing his labours, besmirching his honour, and stigmatising his project as chimerical.

De Lesseps arrived in England late in June, 1870, only a few weeks before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, but before this he had been the recipient of an official letter from the Earl of Clarendon, Minister for Foreign Affairs:

“ The successful opening of the Suez Canal has been received with great and universal satisfaction. In having the honour of congratulating you, as well

as the French nation and Government which have taken such a profound and constant interest in your work, I know that I faithfully represent the sentiments of my fellow-citizens. Notwithstanding the obstacles of all kinds against which you have had to struggle, a brilliant success has finally recompensed your indomitable perseverance. It affords me sincere pleasure to be the organ for transmitting to you the felicitations of Her Majesty's Government on the establishment of a new means of communication between the East and the West, and on the political and commercial advantages which we may confidently expect will result from your efforts."

A great welcome awaited De Lesseps at Liverpool, followed in London by a grand banquet given at Stafford House by the Duke of Sutherland. Old supporters and opponents of the scheme were present, Mr. Gladstone among the former and Mr. Disraeli among the latter. Two days later at the annual City banquet the Lord Mayor toasted "him who had brought Madras within twenty-one days of England," and he added: "Our famous engineers were deceived; M. de Lesseps was in the right; and the Suez Canal is an accomplished fact."

The next day was made memorable by a fête at the Crystal Palace, on a scale of which only that once popular institution was capable. Royal and distinguished personages were among the guests in the great banqueting hall, and 30,000 visitors thronged the grounds and courts to greet the Lion of the hour. The brilliant function finished with one of the most magnifi-



"MOSÉ IN EGITTO!!!"

MR. DISRAELI PURCHASES THE SUEZ CANAL SHARES
From a Cartoon in "Punch," December 11, 1875

cent of the Palace's famous firework displays, which included a great set-piece, a pyramid outlined in golden fire, bearing the inscription: "To De Lesseps England offers hearty congratulations." Fiery palm-trees stood on either side, which changed colour as the set-piece burnt on, and between each pair of trees was seen emblems, the one the Turkish star and the other the flag of Egypt.

On July 11th, the Prime Minister, Mr. Gladstone, announced to M. de Lesseps that the Queen had bestowed upon him the Grand Cross of the Order of the Star of India. And on the same day at a Court of Common Council of the City of London, it was unanimously resolved "That the freedom of this city, in a gold box, be presented to M. Ferdinand de Lesseps, for his skill in designing, and his indomitable energy and perseverance in carrying to a successful completion, the Suez Canal, and that it be referred to the General Purposes Committee to take the necessary steps accordingly, at an expense not exceeding one hundred guineas."

The admission of De Lesseps to the honorary freedom of the City was made by the Chamberlain on July 30th in appropriate words. The recipient replied as follows:

"My Lord Mayor, Mr. Chamberlain, and gentlemen, the freedom of the City of London has been the popular recompense awarded to ministers who have rendered the greatest services to the country, to men such as Cobden and Peabody, who have had the happiness to contribute by pacific means to the world's progress; it has likewise been awarded to your victori-

ous generals, the last of whom was my friend Lord Napier, the victor of Magdala.

“ In according to me the honorary freedom—this rare and most precious distinction—you have consecrated and aggrandised the enterprise of the Suez Maritime Canal, of which you have proclaimed the success and the advantages.

“ If Egypt and France have created this universal work, it remained for England to vivify it by supplying the aid of which it might stand in need, until the time when the commerce of all nations should be prepared to follow the decisive impulse so unmistakably given to the work by the great shipping interests of the United Kingdom.

“ Thanks to this new element of support from England, and to the continuance of French co-operation, the financial Company, which you have been pleased to admit has deserved the approval of civilisation, will be placed beyond the reach of harm, in the difficult crisis intervening between the commencement of the traffic and the stages of its more complete development; and will subsequently be enabled, in accordance with the desires you have expressed, to complete improvements destined to afford still greater facilities to a passage which abbreviates by one-half the distance between England and her Eastern Empire.

“ I congratulate myself, under the present circumstances, in having heard from you the expression of sentiments rendering such loyal justice to my country for the persevering part it has taken in a great work, the immediate effect of which is a pacific and fruitful revolution.

“ France, the sincere friend of England, its worthy emulator for good, is one of the standard-bearers of civilisation and liberty in times of peace as well as in times of war ; and it may be expected of France in the conflict unfortunately inevitable (*the Franco-Prussian War*), and which we witness with emotion and respect, that the blood which will flow on both sides will not be uselessly shed for the good of humanity.”

Thus, with the best that she could give, did England attempt to meet some of her obligations to the man to whom she owed so much.

But De Lesseps could tarry no longer in England. The gravity of France’s struggle with Prussia called him back to Paris. Already some were saying that his business in London was to sell the Suez Canal to the English.

During the siege of the French capital in December, 1870, where De Lesseps himself was among the beleaguered citizens, the emotion and excitement of the time produced a crop of scurrilous pamphlets, *The Truth about the Suez Canal* one proclaimed. Another was entitled, *The Agony of the Suez Canal, Barrenness of the Results. Its approaching Ruin.* To all these De Lesseps replied through the Press and the Courts. But one fact he had to admit, that the enterprise had been far more costly than he had anticipated. Indeed, his estimates were millions out: he was no financier. Furthermore the calculations of tonnage passing through the canal were equally wide of the mark. Not for many years did they attain the figures expected. In consequence the Company faced a financial crisis, and once more it became necessary to

have recourse to a loan. Nearly a million pounds was wanted immediately to avert disaster; but when the issue was made the public response provided less than half of the sum required.

Then into the offices of the Company stepped the wealthy M. Lebaudy. He demanded to see Charles de Lesseps. Several times he was refused an interview, but in the end he was invited in. "I have come to bring you the money," he announced on entering. Charles de Lesseps prayed him to be seated. Lebaudy then explained that he had the utmost confidence in the founder of the enterprise, and that he had come personally to make an effort to save the situation. "How much do you want to avert disaster?" he enquired. "Another seven million francs," replied De Lesseps, junior. The whole amount was subscribed without hesitation, and the Company was enabled to meet its pressing obligations. From that time the concern never looked back.

In 1874 there was trouble over the tonnage dues; but the major sensation was the purchase by Great Britain in the following year of the Khedive Ismail's Suez Canal shares.

For some time the finances of Egypt had been in a parlous condition. Ismail had to raise money somehow, and it soon became known that he was willing to sell his shares—176,602 in number—in the Suez Canal. Disraeli, now Prime Minister, was anxious to acquire the shares for Britain. But, on enquiry, he discovered that a French financial group held an option. The sudden relinquishing of this option gave him his opportunity. Four million pounds was needed for the

purchase, and as Parliament was not in session it was impossible for the special credits required to be voted in the usual way.

A great deal that is fanciful has been written about the transaction. M. André Maurois, for instance, in his *Life of Disraeli*, describes the manner in which the money was obtained. "Montagu Corry, that day, was waiting in the antechamber while the Cabinet deliberated. The Chief put his head out of the half-opened door and said only one word: 'Yes.' Ten minutes later Corry was at Rothschild's house, and found him at dinner. Disraeli needs four millions by to-morrow, he told him. Rothschild, who was in the process of eating some grapes, selected a berry, spat out the pip, and said: 'What guarantee?—The British Government.—You shall have them.' " In more sedate, but no less enthusiastic language, that was the result that Disraeli conveyed to Queen Victoria.

A letter from Disraeli to Lady Bradford, dated November 25th, 1875, is singularly revealing, and well worth quoting in full.

"As you complain sometimes, though I think unjustly, that I tell you nothing, I will now tell you a great State secret, though it may not be one in 4 and 20 hours (still you will like to know it 4 and 20 hours sooner than the newspapers can tell you)—a State secret, certainly the most important of this year, and not one of the least events of our generation. After a fortnight of the most unceasing labor and anxiety, I (for, between ourselves, and ourselves only, I may be egotistical in this matter)—I have purchased

for England, the Khedive of Egypt's interest in the Suez Canal.

“ We have had all the gamblers, capitalists, financiers of the world, organised and platooned in bands of plunder, arrayed against us, and secret emissaries in every corner, and have baffled them all, and have never been suspected.

“ The day before yesterday, Lesseps, whose Company has the remaining shares, backed by the French Government, whose agent he was, made a great offer. Had it succeeded, the whole of the Suez Canal would have belonged to France, and they might have shut it up!

“ We have given the Khedive 4 millions sterling for his interest, and run the chance of Parliament supporting us. We could not call them together for the matter, for that would have blown everything to the skies, or to Hades.

“ The Faery (*the Queen*) is in ecstacies about ‘this great and important event’—wants ‘to know all about it when Mr. D. comes down to-day.’

“ I have rarely been through a week like the last—and am to-day in a state of prostration—coma—sorry I have to go down to Windsor—still more sorry not to have had a line to-day, which would have soothed.

Your affectionate,
D.

“ P.S.—Though secret here, the telegraph will send the news from Egypt, I doubt not, to-day.”*

* *The Letters of Disraeli to Lady Bradford and Lady Chesterfield*, edited by the Marquis of Zetland.

Disraeli could not refrain from dramatising the whole business, and exaggerating the mystery surrounding the transaction. Lord Derby, addressing a meeting at Edinburgh on the 27th, threw a colder light on the affair. "There was no deep-laid scheme in the matter," he said. "We have stated what we want, and why we want it, and Europe is accustomed to believe what we say. It was only at the beginning of the week that we knew the intentions and need of the Khedive to sell his shares. My wish, and I expressed it, was that he should keep them. But, on the one hand, he had urgent need of obtaining resources for repayments which admitted of no delay; and, on the other hand, we knew that negotiations were going on between the Société Générale and the Egyptian Government for the acquisition of those same shares. Therefore we had either to allow the script to pass into other hands, or to buy it ourselves. I can assure you that we have acted solely with the intention of preventing a larger foreign influence from preponderating in a matter so important to us. We have the greatest consideration for M. de Lesseps. We acknowledge that, instead of opposing him in his great work, we should have done better to associate ourselves with him. I deny, on behalf of my colleagues and myself, any intention of predominating in the deliberations of the Company, or of abusing our recent acquisition to force its decisions. What we have done is purely defensive. I do not think, moreover, that the Government and English subjects are proprietors of the majority of shares. I said some time ago in the House of Lords that I would not oppose an arrangement

which would place the Suez Canal under the management of an international syndicate. I will not propose this, but I in no way withdraw my words."

This statement set at rest the fears that were expressed that England's acquisition of the shares had anything to do with an intention of subjecting Egypt to our will by means of a crafty financial transaction.

Shortly after Parliament met in February, 1876, after a stirring debate, the purchase of the Suez Canal shares was approved, the motion being carried without a division.

England now had a substantial interest in the undertaking, an interest which led directly to her intervention in Egypt in 1882, when the revolt of Ahmed-Arabi against the Khedive Tewfik threatened the destruction of the canal. The revolt in its inception was due to the disaffection of the ill-fed and ill-paid Egyptian soldiery, but it rapidly assumed a fanatical anti-European character. Riots broke out in Alexandria, and Arabi proceeded to strengthen the fortifications of the port. The Admirals of the French and English squadrons protested, and threatened to bombard the forts unless Arabi abandoned his activities. No satisfaction being obtained, ships entering the Suez Canal were warned that hostilities were imminent, and on July 11th Alexandria was shelled by the British Fleet. This measure, however, only served to increase the fury of the agitators and led to the burning and pillaging of the European quarter of the city.

"The time had gone by for the measured movement of the European Concert," writes Basil Worsfold. "If the costly international fabric of the Suez Canal, and

the lives of the European residents and the native Christians—to say nothing of the millions of capital recovered for the bond-holders by the Dual Control—were to be rescued from the fanatical violence of the Mohammedan population, prompt action must be taken. After an unsuccessful appeal to France to join in the military occupation, which could alone save the situation, the British Government determined to act alone. On July 22nd, Admiral Seymour wrote to the Khedive to assure him that the British Fleet under his command was operating with the sole purpose of protecting His Highness and the people of Egypt against the rebels. At the same time, the Khedive issued a proclamation, in which he denounced Arabi as a rebel; and Arabi thereupon replied by proclaiming the *Jehad*, or Holy War. On July 24th, the British troops were landed at Alexandria, and the town was effectively occupied. A week later, the French fleet received orders to withdraw, and England was left to fulfil the task to which she was now definitely committed."

The first business of the expeditionary force was to occupy the threatened Canal zone. De Lesseps was deeply mortified at the failure of his own country to lend her aid. He thought he saw his own work and that of his father before him being undone in a day by the wretched political changes at home. In unreasoning excitement he telegraphed to Arabi: "The English shall never enter the Canal, never. Make no attempt to intercept *my* Canal. *I* am there. Not a single English soldier shall disembark without being accompanied by a French soldier. *I* answer for everything!"

Back came the reply: "Sincere thanks. Assurances consolatory, but not sufficient under the existing circumstances. The defence of Egypt requires the temporary destruction of the Canal."

It was fortunate for De Lesseps that his beloved Canal was not left to the mercy of Arabi's wild soldiery. The British troops duly occupied the Canal zone and temporarily closed the waterway to shipping.

In two months the whole campaign was over. The victory of Tel-el-Kebir on September 13th broke Arabi's power and resistance, and immediately afterwards he surrendered to Sir Garnet Wolseley. Thus began the British occupation of Egypt, which lasted for nearly fifty years, and thus ended the control of France initiated by Napoleon seventy-five years previously.

The changed circumstances in Egypt had their effect on the fortunes of the Canal. England now obtained an increased share in its direction, and a scheme was even set on foot for the construction of a second canal parallel to the existing one sponsored entirely by Britain under agreement with De Lesseps; but this was abandoned under a storm of protest. The most important outcome of the British occupation, however, was to draw general attention to the question of the neutrality of the Suez Canal. Was it permissible for any Power to be able to close a passage so vital to the nations of Europe? De Lesseps had always insisted that the Canal, designed for the benefit of mankind and the free commercial intercourse between East and West, should never be subject to any Power whatsoever, but should at all times be accessible to the shipping of every country. The satisfaction was given him in his life-

time of seeing that ideal safeguarded by the Convention of 1888 concluded between the great European Powers, of which the first Article read:

“ The Maritime Canal of Suez shall always be free and open, in time of war as in time of peace, to every vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag. Consequently the High Contracting Parties agree not in any way to interfere with the free use of the Canal, in time of war, as in time of peace. The Canal can never be subjected to the exercise of the right of blockade.”

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO PANAMA

THE ten years which elapsed between the opening of the Suez Canal and the sitting of the Congress which decided to embark on a Panama Canal were troublous times for France. The unhappy war with Prussia of 1870-1871 left the country a prey to conflicting policies, stricken and burdened. The Empire passed away, and it was not until the end of the decade that the Third Republic settled fully into its stride.

De Lesseps was at the Tuilleries on the eve of Sedan, and when the Empress took her last farewell of Paris he was among those who helped to protect the palace from the mob. The sufferings of France and of the imperial family touched not only his patriotism, but deeply affected him personally. To Napoleon III and his consort he owed much of his own success, and it grieved him that while his own star rode high in the firmament theirs had set. He was an old man now, though his natural vigour was not abated and the children of his second marriage clung about his knees. He had seen many changes in the Government of France; but now as ever he desired not to meddle in internal politics. Resistance to the many claims made upon him was not easy. He stood so high in the esteem of his countrymen, and there seemed to be so few who were detached from considerations of party or personal

ambition, that it was difficult to refuse when left or right wings were anxious to attach his name to their standards. But only once did he give his reluctant consent, and then only because he was appealed to earnestly by the former Emperor. He was by no means sorry when he was beaten at the polls by his opponent Gambetta.

Outside of politics he was happy enough in his connections with numerous scientific and humanitarian bodies, in reading papers, presiding at conferences, and writing up the history of his beloved Suez Canal. The affairs of the Company, as we have already seen, occupied much of his time, and important negotiations of one kind or another were going on continually.

The achievement of Suez gave a definite impetus to designs for a canal that should link the Atlantic with the Pacific, and De Lesseps could not fail to take an active interest in the various schemes that were proposed.

The New World like the Old World had had its dreams, and though the advocates of the Interoceanic Canal could not point to such a remote antiquity for the inception of their idea, still it had had a respectable history. It was in 1513 that the existence of the Pacific Ocean first became known to Europe, when a Spanish Conquistador, Vasco Nuñez de Bilbao, led by Indian guides, scaled the Cordilleras and saw to the South a great sheet of water stretching away to the horizon. He called it the Southern Sea, because the Isthmus of Panama runs East to West. Subsequent explorers made vain attempts to find a natural passage through the neck of land separating the two oceans; but the



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expedition of Magellan in 1520 showed that the nearest way for ships was by a long and dangerous voyage to the South through the Straits named after him.

It was clear that the only way to obtain ready access to the Southern Sea was by artificial means, and a book was published as early as 1550 by Antonio Galvao, the Portugese navigator, demonstrating that a canal could be cut at Tehuantepec, Nicaragua, Panama or Darien. A year later the Spanish historian Gomara presented a memorial to Philip II, strongly urging him to undertake such an enterprise. At first the monarch listened favourably, and even went so far as to send out two Flemish engineers to study the ground. But the Spanish Government was not now concerned to find a rapid route to Cathay; it was more anxious to safeguard its newly-won possessions. Councillors played upon the king's religious scruples, and warned him against trying to improve on the works of the Creator. The result was that all plans for a canal were abandoned, and "to seek or make known any better route than the one from Porto Bello to Panama was forbidden under penalty of death." The archives of Madrid swallowed up all writings on the subject, and Spain lost a great opportunity. A change of policy in the late eighteenth century initiated fresh surveys at Tehuantepec and Nicaragua, but political disturbances at home rendered them abortive.

England took a hand in 1695 when William Paterson obtained the sanction of William III to found New Caledonia in Darien, and included an interoceanic canal in his plans. But the whole undertaking ended in disaster.

With the dawn of the nineteenth century there was a widespread revival of interest in the piercing of the Isthmus of Panama. In 1808 Alexander von Humboldt surveyed the ground, and concluded that a canal was feasible though "the elevation of the country would force engineers to have recourse to a system of locks." Goethe was among those whose enthusiasm he kindled; but the famous German deemed it a task for some bold spirit in the future, and regretted that he would not be alive to see it accomplished.

From 1825 the Republic of the Centre was in continuous receipt of applications for a concession to cut the canal. They came from Great Britain and the United States. In 1830 a concession was actually granted to a Dutch Corporation under the special patronage of the King of the Netherlands to construct a canal through Nicaragua, but the scheme fell through owing to the division into separate kingdoms of Holland and Belgium. A few years later France joined the aspirants for the honour of linking the two oceans by water, but again the various plans came to nothing.

At last the necessary preliminary step was accomplished with the opening by America of a railroad from Colon to Panama, though for a time the privileges accorded to the company stood in the way of any canal construction, just as the railway to Suez had interfered with the making of the Suez Canal.

The parallel circumstances were continued by the conflict of engineers on which was the most practicable route for a canal, the shorter route through Panama favoured by the French or the longer route through

Nicaragua favoured by the Americans. Numerous expeditions surveyed the territory, whose work proved invaluable later. At least it was made clear that the two routes mentioned were the only ones possible.

“I should occupy too much space,” writes De Lesseps in his *Recollections*, “were I to quote all the names attached to this wonderful enterprise, but I cannot pass on without saluting the most famous among them, including Nelson, Childs, Lloyd, and our fellow-countryman Garella, and, above all, Thomé de Gamond, who was the first to propose the making of a tunnel between France and England, and he lived long enough to see it at all events begun. There can be no higher reward for those who devote their lives to the pursuance of useful truths than to witness the commencement of the enterprise upon which their hearts are set. From the year 1780 down to the present day a host of projects have been put forward for piercing the isthmus, some of them very carefully thought out and others purely fancy schemes. But the last few years have produced more than the whole of the previous period. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 produced a complete revolution in the commercial relations of the whole world, and I have no doubt that this event had a considerable influence upon the researches into the piercing of the American canal. For it is within the last fifteen years that so many bodies of explorers have gone out to investigate the nature of the work, and have come back loaded with valuable information calculated to throw light upon this intricate question. All honour to them for their zeal in assisting science to make this great step forward. At the same

time, geographical studies which had been so much neglected in France, had, as a result of the war of 1870, which showed how necessary they were, again occupied public attention, and the learned societies which had inscribed geography in their programme commanded plenty of support.

“ Thus at the Antwerp International Congress, General Heine propounded the interoceanic scheme due to M. de Gogorza, and at the Paris Congress in 1875 the same subject occupied several sittings when I was in the chair. The information necessary for discussing the question in detail was not then forthcoming, and all that could be done was to express approval of the principle and convoke for a near date a special congress, or, it should rather be said, an international jury, to collect and collate all the necessary documents, and to form a definite opinion, after full deliberation, as to the technical and financial possibility of the work.

“ This resolution had the effect of giving a fresh impetus to the explorers and the authors of the scheme, all of whom were anxious to submit to the Congress complete and accurate plans. So that as soon as the proposed congress was announced, two companies were formed for making fresh expeditions, one of which visited Nicaragua, following the original route of Thomé de Gamond and Blanchet, while the other, under the conduct of General Türr, explored the more southern regions of Darien and Panama, marching in the steps of Garella, Lacharine, and Selfridge. The three years between 1875 and 1879 were fruitful in active researches and energetically conducted exploration. At the same date the expeditions set on foot by

the United States were brought to a conclusion, and the able officers in command, Collins, Hull, Shufeldt, and especially Selfridge and Menocal, had left no part of the isthmus unexplored, while the documents which they brought back with them were calculated to facilitate the labours of the Congress very materially.

“ When the time arrived, and all the details relating to the recent expeditions were in my possession, I summoned the Congress, applying to all the savants, engineers, and sailors of the Old and the New World, as well as the chambers of commerce and the geographical societies, whom I asked to appoint delegates.

“ Few assemblies have included so many illustrious names as this great tribunal, which consisted of the leading representatives of science, politics, and industry. The first sitting was held on the 15th of May, 1879, at the meeting place of the Geographical Society, nearly every country being represented at the Congress. Mexico sent the engineer, F. de Garay, and China the mandarin Li-Shu-Chang. The United States were represented by Admiral Ammen, whose wide knowledge was of great service, Commander Selfridge, and the engineer, Menocal; while the countries of Europe had sent their leading geographers and engineers, such as Sir John Hawkshaw, and Sir John Stokes, Commander Cristoforo Negri, Signor de Gioià, the engineer Dirks, who cut the Amsterdam canal, and his colleague Conrad, President Ceresole, Colonel Coello, Dr. Broch, Admiral Likatcheff, Colonel Wouvermans, M. d'Hane Stenhuys, and many others whose names I ought perhaps to add, including all the most eminent scientific men in France. With an assembly thus composed, it

was quite certain that the discussion would be frank, open, and luminous, and that the Congress would not separate until it had found a solution for the problem which was set before it."

Preparatory to the great Congress De Lesseps had already been instrumental in obtaining the most valuable data, especially through the expedition of 1878 led by Lieutenant L. N. Bonaparte Wyse, an officer in the French Navy. Wyse had not only traversed the Panama route, but he had also come to an understanding with the Panama Railroad and secured a concession for the construction of the canal from the Columbian Government.

Thus matters stood when the seventy-four year old uniter of seas prepared to essay the union of oceans.

CHAPTER II

CONGRESS DECIDES

IN reviewing the proceedings of the Paris Congress one can perceive in the light of subsequent events what were its great failings. It was composed of experts and technicians who dealt altogether too academically with the problems placed before them. Up to a point this was entirely justifiable. But these authorities were too patently obsessed with their figures and methods to be able to give proper consideration to the human factor which is liable to upset all such calculations. The conditions under which workmen were expected to labour in the construction of the canal were stated certainly in all their horror, but they were brushed aside as inconsequential. If De Lesseps sinned in this respect, his sin was shared by all the other members of the Congress. But he did not sin consciously. He had a visionary belief in the rapid reclamation of the humid jungles of Panama.

In order to expedite its task the Congress was subdivided into five committees, each of which was given a special aspect of the subject with which to deal. There was first of all a Statistical Committee charged with estimating the probable amount of traffic that would pass through the canal. "I had had an opportunity of saying," recalls De Lesseps, "that the best

course for the Panama, as it had been for the Suez Canal, would be to prosecute the work by means of public money, and ask for nothing from any of the governments, leaving the enterprise its purely industrial character, and avoiding anything like dabbling in politics. The question, therefore, was to know whether the capital invested would obtain a sufficient return by the traffic passing through the canal.”

The second committee was called the Economic Commission, and had to calculate on the basis of traffic what tariff would have to be charged on the tonnage passing through the canal. “Then it was necessary to estimate what would be the consequence of the cutting of the American isthmus, what influence the canal would have upon the trade and industry of each nation, and what new markets it would open to the trade of the whole world.”*

“The province of the third section was a more technical one, and it was composed of sailors, who discussed the influence of the canal upon shipbuilding, elucidated the regime of the winds and currents near the various canal routes submitted to the consideration of the jury, and pointed out under what conditions the safety and facility of the passage through the canal could be secured. This commission made an estimate of the speed of the vessels in proportion to the draught of water, and gave its opinions as to the effect of locks and tunnels in a canal intended to be used by the largest ships in existence.”

The fourth committee was required to make a care-

* All the quotations dealing with the deliberations of the Congress are from chapter VII of De Lesseps' *Recollections*, entitled “The Inter-oceanic Canal and the Congress of 1879.”

ful examination of the different routes which the canal might take. "Differing in this respect from the other sections, its functions were of a more general kind, as it had to discuss each project from an engineering point of view, to indicate the advantages and drawbacks of each, and fix what each would cost, both for construction and annual maintenance."

The last committee was one of ways and means and was required to elaborate the work of the second committee.

This is not the place to describe the proceedings of the committees and the Congress as a whole in any detail; but we may usefully review, as De Lesseps does himself, "the general considerations which were submitted to the international jury, and received its approval."

The Statistical Committee called for a report from M. Fontane, the Secretary-General of the Suez Canal Company, who proved that an annual traffic of six million tons was only possible in a canal through which fifty ships could pass in twenty-four hours, and he added: "This was why it was necessary in making the Suez Canal to adopt the system of a canal on one level without locks or drawbacks, to the exclusion of several very ingenious and bold plans presented by engineers of great repute."

M. Simonin, the reporter of the second committee, summed up the advantages of new markets and new traffic which would result from the cutting of the canal, and what distances would be saved to navigators. "From France and England, that is to say, from Liverpool, Havre, Nantes, and Bordeaux, the distance to

San Francisco, round Cape Horn, is 5,000 leagues, whereas by Panama it would be only 1,500. For Valparaiso the distance would be reduced from 3,000 to 2,000 leagues. The saving in time for sailing vessels would be sixty days to San Francisco and thirty to Valparaiso. To this must be added the fact that steamers and sailing vessels alike would avoid the dangerous passage round Cape Horn. Thus the distance and the time in going from one part of the globe to the other would be materially shortened, and there would be such a reduction in the rates of assurance and freight that maritime intercourse would soon double itself, and that many markets now closed to European commerce would be opened, and provide it with fresh openings for import and export trade."

The Navigation Committee, having considered that among the many schemes proposed, some involved the making of a tunnel, others that of locks, reported that the opening of the canal would favour sailing vessels even more than steamers, owing to the advantages derived by the former from the permanency of trade winds in the Gulf of Mexico. "As regards the tunnel," the report concluded, "the vessels would have to go through with their mainmasts up, and as the largest vessels, such as the *France* and the *Annamite*, have very high masts, they would require an altitude of nearly a hundred feet above the level of the water. With regard to locks, they must be sufficiently numerous to admit of fifty vessels going through in a day. This is the total which has been reached at Suez, and there is no reason why it should not be equalled, and even exceeded, by the Panama Canal. It would be neces-

sary, therefore, to have double locks, side by side, one for vessels going west and the other for vessels going east, and the construction of these would entail special arrangements. In conclusion, therefore, I would say that a canal with locks ought only to be accepted if a canal on the level is proved to be impossible. So with regard to the tunnel, which should only be adopted if it is found that, owing to technical difficulties or excessive cost, the canal cannot be made without one."

By far the most interesting were the deliberations of the fourth committee, and its sub-committees, on the most practical route for the canal. The authors of the several schemes were present to state their case and to answer objections, men who had spent many months on the ground, and who should have pointed out clearly to the members of the committees that the technical difficulties were by no means the only ones that had to be surmounted. It was not only the rivers in their courses that fought against the project, the precipitous mountains, and the torrid jungles, but the insect life and dread fevers engendered by the climate which made of the isthmus a white man's grave. De Lesseps offers us a brief description, which might have been considerably amplified by those who came fresh from their experiences to give their evidence. But the arguments and discussions arising out of the purely engineering problems, where each body of experts was anxious to stress the merits of its own solution, overshadowed every other consideration.

"The American isthmus," writes De Lesseps, "extends a distance of 1,437 miles from the north-west

to the south-east. Only the coasts and the banks of some of the principal rivers are inhabited, the interior of the country being so scantily peopled that the total population is only three millions, while France, covering the same area, has a population seven or eight times as large. There are next to no roads, and what few exist are very badly kept. Excepting these, the only means of communication are the rivers, and many of these are very difficult to navigate, as they are intersected by rapids, which the Indian avoids by carrying his canoe overland. The climate is a very torrid one, while it often rains for six months in the year, the annual rainfall at Panama exceeding ten feet. It is not surprising that, with such a high temperature and so heavy a rainfall, the vegetation develops with wonderful rapidity. Thus the organic life of the isthmus is very exuberant, and the virgin forests, with their gigantic cactus and cocoa trees, and their undergrowth, athwart which the native cuts a path with his axe or knife, form an inextricable network. It would almost seem as if all the venomous inmates of Noah's Ark had been emptied here, the country swarming with serpents whose bite is fatal, monstrous spiders, scorpions, and jaguars; but, upon the other hand, it lends itself admirably to cultivation and industry, by means of which it would soon be completely transformed.

"The ground is mountainous, the chain of the Andes rising to a height of over 13,000 feet, and presenting a striking contrast of volcanoes and of summits capped with snow. This is the land in which the canal is about to be cut; it is upon this wide causeway, which separates North and South America, that the weak

point in the armour has been found to effect a breach between the two oceans."

After several schemes had been considered it was clear that "two projects alone were before the Commission: one for making the canal through Nicaragua, the other through Panama."

The Nicaraguan scheme was that advocated by the Americans. Very favourable for the purposes of a canal was the existence in the centre of the isthmus of a fine lake, 110 miles long by 35 broad. The total length of the canal, including the 55 miles of the upper lake, would have been 182½ miles, and the time occupied in going through it four and a half days. It was estimated to cost £32,000,000. Its disadvantage lay in the necessity for a number of difficult locks owing to the lake being situated on a plateau rising 125 feet above sea level, and the cataracts of the river San Juan.

The Panama scheme recommended by Wyse and Reclus planned a canal on the level. The distance to be cut would be much shorter, being only 47½ miles, and the time occupied in passing through thirty-six hours. It would also run within half a mile of the railway, and have already existing ports at both ends in Panama and Colon. The estimated cost would be £40,000,000. The disadvantages of the scheme seemed at first examination to be greater than the Nicaraguan proposal. There was first of all the cutting of an immense tunnel through the Cordilleras. Then there was the difficulty created by the sudden risings of the Chagres River, the irruption of which would have been dangerous in the making and working of the

canal. Lastly there was the difference in the tides at the Atlantic and Pacific end which would set up strong currents in the canal, and create a danger to navigation.

In the end the Commission decided to recommend the Panama scheme, after several amendments had been made to it. These involved a deep cutting in place of a tunnel, the creation of a new bed for the Chagres River, and the construction of a tidal gate and waiting basin at the Panama end of the canal. On this finding the fifth committee reported: "We are convinced that the sum of the elements of transit, already amply sufficient to defray the cost of the canal, is destined, as the work develops, to expand to an incalculable extent."

The whole proceedings of the Congress occupied a fortnight, and towards the end the reports of the various committees were submitted and co-ordinated, and the following resolution was put to the assembly:

"The Congress is of opinion that the cutting of an inter-oceanic canal with one level, so desirable in the interests of trade and navigation, is possible, and that this maritime canal, in order to give the indispensable facilities of access and use which a passage of this kind must be supposed to give, should go from the Gulf of Limon to the Bay of Panama."

The resolution was put to the vote, and out of ninety-eight members present seventy-eight voted in favour, eight against, and twelve abstained. Such a large majority for the scheme which he favoured must have been very gratifying to De Lesseps. Already he saw

all difficulties and obstacles overcome in his vision of this wonderful enterprise.

“Carrying my mind back a few years,” he says, “I cannot but remember how many people—including several eminent men, too—formerly treated the Suez enterprise as impracticable. They said that it was madness to try and create a port in the Gulf of Pelusium, to traverse the mud of Lake Mensaleh and the entrance to El-Guisr, to pass through the sand banks of the desert, and form workshops twenty-five leagues away from any village, in a land which had no inhabitants, no water, no roads, to fill up the basin of the Bitter Lakes, and to prevent the sand from silting up the canal.

“Yet all that was accomplished, at what a cost in labour and perseverance I well know; and I maintain that the Panama will be easier to make, easier to complete, and easier to keep up than the Suez Canal. . . .

“I may add that I have never been alarmed by the obstacles thrown in the path of a great enterprise, nor by the delays which discussion and contradictory arguments entail, my experience having taught me that what is accomplished too quickly has no deep roots, and that ‘Time hallows only that which he has himself made.’”

A veritable storm of applause greeted the decision of the Congress, applause which in no small measure was intended for the grand old man who had presided with such confidence and amazing vitality at its sessions. Already, before the close of the assembly, he was being keenly pressed on every hand to assume the leadership

of the gigantic enterprise. "It seemed," writes Robert Courau, "as if the name of the conqueror of Suez was sufficient in itself to bring in the enormous capital sum that was required." At the Congress banquet Gambetta saluted him as "the Grand Frenchman" and besought him to take the task in hand. Victor Hugo likewise encouraged him.

Flattered by these lavish praises the old man could not resist the temptation, though many of his friends and his own son Charles sought by all means to dissuade him.

"What are you going to seek at Panama?" Charles wrote to him. "Is it money? You will not be able to concern yourself for that at Panama any more than you did at Suez. Is it glory? You have received it in such abundance that you can well leave that to others. All of us who have laboured at your side need a little rest. The Panama enterprise is certainly grandiose. . . . I believe that it is practicable . . . but what a risk will be incurred by those who are at the head of it! Do remember that the Suez Canal, during the ten years that it was under construction, was several times on the brink of disaster. . . . Even when the canal was open, on the verge of that prosperity which you had promised, you had to go to the public for twenty millions so that the Company would not be driven into liquidation; and then they gave you only five. . . . You pulled things together at Suez by a miracle. Is it not better in a lifetime to be satisfied with one miracle accomplished, without relying on a second?"

But De Lesseps seemed beyond the call of reason.

"I have already committed two acts of folly in my life," he said with a trace of his old wit. "Now I am about to commit a third. I hope to live long enough to see those who to-day are attacking the Panama Canal recognise that there is a glimmering of sense in this folly."

Seeing that nothing would move his father, Charles told him: "If you are determined to go forward . . . if you want me to follow you, I will do so with a good grace, without ever complaining no matter what befall. All that I am, I owe to you: whatever you have given me, you have the right to take back."

Brave words, and bravely honoured in the event! but big with the presage of coming evil. Perhaps to De Lesseps as well there came a prophetic moment when the cold light of actuality broke through the thick incense-laden clouds of adulation; but if that was so, he dismissed the warning with a gesture of fatality.

"At the moment when you are about to separate," he told the Congress at its final session, "I have to confess to you that I have been passing through a time of great perplexity. I had no thought, a fortnight ago, that I should be expected to put myself at the head of a new enterprise. My best friends have been anxious to dissuade me from it, telling me that after Suez I ought to take some rest. Ah well! if it is demanded of a general who has won a first victory, whether he is willing to win a second, he cannot well refuse."

Prolonged applause greeted this announcement. De Lesseps was hailed as World Citizen. He was committed definitely to the conduct of the gigantic project.

Once he had taken the decisive step the old campaigner set about his task with characteristic energy. Within a few months of the close of the Congress he had organised and registered the Universal Interoceanic Canal Company, which acquired the Concession granted by the Columbian Government to Lieutenant Wyse for the construction of the canal. By the end of the year—1879—De Lesseps was ready to set out for Panama to study the ground. His wife and three of their children accompanied him.

None of the ancient navigators who crossed the Atlantic Ocean looked more eagerly than De Lesseps for land to appear on the far western horizon. He had not come in quest of gold, nor to find a passage through to the Pacific. He had come to create a passage and through it to promote the wealth of nations. Invigorated by the voyage, every doubt was swept from his mind. The nearer he drew to Panama the more his optimism increased; and when the goal was reached he gave the first symbolic blow with his pickaxe with no less assurance than the Spanish Conquistador Vasco Nuñez de Bilbao planted the standard of Spain and took possession in the name of his sovereign.

CHAPTER III

WATERLOO IN PANAMA

ACCOMPANIED by his engineers De Lesseps made an almost triumphal tour of the route which the canal would take. He had arrived in the dry season, when everything looked fresh and lovely after the prolonged rains. He could find no justification for the alarmist pictures which had been painted by those who knew the country well, though M. Leblanc, a French resident, told him bluntly that if he attempted the construction of a canal across the isthmus, there would not be trees enough there to make crosses for the graves of his labourers. The future Napoleon III, who had studied the literature relating to the interoceanic canal while in London in 1848-49, had decided in favour of the American Nicaraguan scheme against that of Panama, on the ground that in the latter case "the canal could only cross a country which was marshy, unwholesome, desolate and uninhabitable, which would offer a passage of thirty miles through stagnant waters and barren rocks, yielding no spot of ground fitted for the growth of a trading community, for sheltering fleets, or for the development and interchange of the produce of the soil." Humboldt had drawn attention to the plague of yellow fever so virulent at Panama, and other writers upon the isthmus such as Dampier, Wafer, and

Walton, had stressed the ghastly character of the climate. As G. Barnett Smith has written: "Human mortality must necessarily be excessive in such a climate, and a consequently high rate of wages was certain to be demanded. Indeed, the event proved that steady, competent, industrious workmen could hardly be attracted to such a spot at any price, and the Company was thus driven to depend upon the scum of the Western Hemisphere for their labour."

But nothing of all this entered into De Lesseps' calculations. He was almost drunk with the consciousness of his own power and destiny, his common sense clouded by roseate dreams. The task was easy, nay, it could be accomplished in less time than it had taken to make the Suex Canal, and at a cost of more than £12,000,000 less than had been estimated by the technical experts at the Congress.

In many ways he had not changed from the man he was forty years previously, as this portrait of him by Tracy Robinson shows: "A small man, French in detail, with winning manners and a magnetic presence. He would conclude almost every statement with, 'The Canal will be made,' just as a famous Roman always exclaimed, 'Delenda est Carthago.' He was accompanied to the Isthmus by his wife and three of his seven children. Being a fine horseman, he delighted in mounting the wildest steeds that Panama could furnish. Riding over the rough country in which the canal was being located all day long, he would dance all night like a boy and be ready for the next day's work 'as fresh as a daisy.'

"I cannot understand," he wrote to his son Charles,

"after going over the various parts of the isthmus with my engineers, how it has taken so long to declare the practicability of a canal on the level between the two oceans, over a distance as short as that from Paris to Fontainebleau."

It must be added, however, that De Lesseps' optimistic view was endorsed by a number of eminent authorities. Work on the canal was begun on February 1st, 1881, and for some months made such good progress that it seemed that after all De Lesseps would prove himself in the right. In October the great Culebra cutting was taken in hand, and before the end of the year the excavators were to start on the actual canal basin on the lower ground, while in the Bay of Colon a marine dredge would scoop out a channel from the sea to the canal.

That same year political clouds appeared on the horizon, and for a time there was friction between Great Britain and the United States on the question as to which of the two Powers should exercise control over the canal. Several despatches passed between Mr. Blaine, the United States Secretary of State in President Garfield's administration and Lord Granville, the English Foreign Minister. Mr. Blaine seemed to fear a repetition of Suez, and that Great Britain would seek to turn the earlier Clayton-Bulwer Treaty to her own advantage. It was proposed that the problem should be dealt with by an agreement guaranteeing the neutrality of the canal, and after Mr. Blaine's retirement the subject was tacitly dropped by both countries.

The series of catastrophes which began in 1882 seemed indeed to show that any discussions of this

nature were premature, and that there would probably not be for many years any canal with which to be concerned. That was the year when a severe earthquake struck the isthmus followed by a huge tidal wave. "On the morning of September 8th, when daylight arose upon the scene in Colon, it was discovered that a vast rent crossed the island, from near the substantial stone freight-sheds of the Panama Railroad Company, right along the front street to the earthen embankment connecting the island with the mainland. Afterwards a fissure was discovered running along the right bank of the Chagres. It was traced for about three miles, and it varied in breadth from several inches to a mere crack, closing below in abysmal blackness. Work was suspended throughout the Isthmus, and it was some time before the population recovered from their alarm."

The second catastrophe occurred three years later when an insurrection broke out against the Columbian Government. Colon was sacked and burnt by armed bodies of filibusters and Jamaica negroes. Hundreds of people were killed, and thousands were rendered homeless. The rising spread across the isthmus, and according to contemporary accounts "Panama itself was spared a similar fate through the promptitude of the American Admiral, who occupied the place with 500 marines. But his action was not a moment too soon. Barricades had already been erected in the streets, and had to be carried. The Plaza was cleared by a Gatling gun, and quiet was restored before night, one rebel being killed and several wounded; but Aizpuru, the insurgent leader, and three of his staff, were arrested, and Panama was saved." It was hinted

that French intrigues were at the bottom of the trouble.

Certainly the enormous number of imported workmen, and many of them of the most degraded type, was creating a definite problem, and Mr. Froude, who visited the workings shortly afterwards, wrote that "in all the world there is not perhaps now concentrated in any single spot so much swindling and villainy, so much foul disease, such a hideous dungheap of moral and physical abomination." And he added: "The scene of operations is a damp tropical jungle, intensely hot, swarming with mosquitoes, snakes, alligators, scorpions, and centipedes; the home, even as Nature made it, of yellow fever, typhus, and dysentery, and now made immeasurably more deadly by the multitudes of people who crowd thither."

Further catastrophes took place in the course of the actual operations due to the unexpected heaviness of the rainfall. In a country used to violent tropical storms, the solid sheets of rain which descended again and again in the years following the earthquake were phenomenal. Earth excavated from the cuts was washed back again, and on one occasion a deep cut on the Colon side was completely filled with water which covered even the machinery. In 1885 the Chagres River was swollen by flood water to such an extent that it was nearly twelve times as wide as the canal, and almost as deep as its deepest point. As the river overhung the canal, it was absolutely necessary to create a dam. As one of the canal chaplains wittily expressed it: "They must dam it, or it will damn them."

Unforeseen difficulties were encountered by the

engineers and serious mistakes were also made. "After being three years and a half on the Isthmus, the officers of the Canal Company discovered beneath an apparently peaceful malarial swamp one vast ledge of volcanic rock. The vast Culebra cuttings were likewise miscalculated as regarded the work necessary to insure stability against the rising of the Chagres torrents. The railroad level was discovered to be wrong, and a higher one must be taken, involving 20 million more cubic metres of excavation, and an additional expense of 40 to 50 million dollars. The problem of damming the Chagres river at Gamboa, another colossal undertaking, remained unsolved in 1888."

But quite apart from the engineering problems, serious and indeed Herculean as they were, there was the terrible human problem which we have already described. The workmen were dying off like flies, and could with difficulty be replaced. At the other end were the principal officials trying to make their lot bearable by the most lavish expenditure of the Company's money on their houses and bathing pools. Dr. Wolfred Nelson, in his work, *Five Years at Panama*, brings the most serious charges against the Company and its methods. He resided at Panama from 1880—1885, and cannot be accused of prejudice. We can offer only brief extracts from his book; but they are very telling. With reference to the new cemetery, he writes: "Between the opening in July, 1884, and the 12th of April, 1886, when I made a special visit to the Isthmus, that cemetery had received 3,884 bodies for burial in the ground, and several hundreds had

been placed in stone niches or *bovedes*. Not only had the new cemetery been filled, but in a section of ground back of the cemetery, in what was part of a large field, there were some dozens of graves. The latter had been opened without any brass bands or Government speeches, or any attendance of the Consular Corps. The old cemetery was on the left. It was a small place of about three-fourths of an acre, and it received all the poorer classes and patients from the Charity and Military Hospital and the Canal Hospitals. Owing to its small size, it was dug up year after year; bones and skulls, fragments of coffins, clothing, and all sorts of things were turned out. The liberation of untold millions of disease germs in that country will make clear to thinking people why the Isthmus is so unhealthy. From time immemorial the Isthmus of Panama has been recognised as one of the plague-spots of the world. It can vie with the West Coast of Africa in pestilential disease. But for the fact that it is one of the world's greatest highways between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the systematic unburial of the dead, under the direct sanction of the Federal Government (they do nothing to check it, knowing all about it), and the consequent distribution of the germs of yellow fever and smallpox, would be of little moment—I say, 'would be of little moment,'—for if the people of those republics are willing to commit suicide in that form, so be it. But, owing to the importance of the Isthmus, called by Paterson the 'Gate to the Pacific and the Key of the Universe,' these insane and unsanitary procedures should be stopped."

The following passage shows the reckless and

extravagant way in which the money of the Panama shareholders was being spent.

" The famous Bureau system is what has obtained in the Isthmus up to this present time, with changes and amplifications without number. There is enough bureaucratic work, and there are enough officers on the Isthmus, to furnish at least one dozen first-class republics and officials for all their departments. The expenditure has been something simply colossal. One Director-General lived in a mansion that cost over \$100,000; his pay was \$50,000 a year; and every time he went out on the line, he had his *deplacement*, which gave him the liberal sum of \$50 a day additional. He travelled in a handsome Pullman car, specially constructed, which was reported to have cost some \$42,000. Later, wishing a summer residence, a most expensive building was put up near La Boca. The preparation of the grounds, the building, and the road thereto, cost upwards of \$150,000.

" The way money has been thrown away is simply astonishing. One canal chief had had built a famous pigeon-house while I was on the Isthmus recently. It cost the Company \$15,000. Another man had built a large bath-house on the most approved principles. This cost \$40,000. Thousands and tens of thousands have been frittered away in ornamental grounds, for all had to be *beau*, utility being a second consideration.

" M. Rousseau was sent to the Isthmus in 1886 by his Government to report upon the Panama Canal.

His inspection was to be preliminary to the emission of a Lottery Loan, providing his report was favourable. M. Rousseau was a keen practical man. While it was quite true that theatrical effects were introduced, he was not deceived.

“During my last visit to the Isthmus I went over the works, notebook in hand, and made sixty photographs. I can summarise all, by stating that the effect was more than depressing. The Canal Company take credit for thirty million dollars’ worth of machinery on the Isthmus of Panama. The greater part of this machinery has been left out in the open, and a prominent engineer told me that two-thirds of it is absolutely useless; and it wouldn’t pay to take it away for old metal. Five millions of dollars have been spent in creating a very pretty, well-kept tropical town at Christophe Colomb. Sidings are covered with valuable engines and all kinds of moveable plant, which are out in all weathers and going to ruin.”

It appeared as if the policy of the Canal executives was, “Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.”

It is needless to elaborate further the melancholy history of the undertaking in the Isthmus itself. The succession of setbacks, whether due to natural obstacles and catastrophes, mismanagement and miscalculation, riot, accident, and act of God, had to have their inevitable sequel. Millions after millions were poured into the insatiable maw of the canal, and still more was demanded. Loan succeeded loan, and was rapidly

absorbed or squandered. The date when the canal would be open receded steadily into infinity.

Feverishly De Lesseps strove to avert the coming crash. He still maintained in public his full confidence in ultimate success. But he must have more money. He proposed to the Government a Lottery Loan, but the Ministry on the reports which they had received refused to sanction the issue. A change of Government, however, reversed this decision, and the Lottery Loan was issued. In stead of being covered four or five times over, as had been anticipated, it was subscribed for very meagrely, partly owing to the spread of a malicious report of De Lesseps' death.

On July 23rd, 1887, the *Economiste Française* stated: "At the fatal point which they have now reached, if the administrators, shareholders, and bond-holders do not know how to make the necessary sacrifices, the year 1889 or 1890 will witness the most terrible financial disaster of the nineteenth century, and probably of all modern history." Again, on December 3rd of the same year, the warning note was sounded. "From all information received through other channels than the Company, it is clearly shown that the situation of the undertaking is getting more and more hopeless. According to the calculations of M. Tanco Armero, the Columbian delegate to the Company, the completion of the canal would necessitate an expense of 3,000 million francs (£116,000,000) for actual work, which with the general expenses and interest would represent over 4,000 million francs (£154,000,000) still to pour into this abyss. The year 1888 will certainly see the liquidation of the Company.

The Lottery Bonds can do nothing towards meeting such great necessities."

But still the courageous old man of eighty-three would not admit to himself that he had met his Waterloo. It was tragic the way in which he still persisted in trying to extricate the Company from its embarrassments. Money had never meant anything to him except as a means to secure the realisation of his great plans. What were millions to set in the balance against the service of humanity? It was a war he was waging for civilisation. He was the general entrusted to secure the victory. It was inevitable that thousands would fall in the struggle. Nothing worth having was achieved without loss. Somehow he had to carry on. Yet he was not unmindful of the financial ruin that might fall on the multitude of small investors who had put their trust in his name and reputation. He wanted to keep faith with them. He believed he could if he could find the necessary support. It was in this spirit, in the autumn of 1888, that he issued his "backs to the wall" message to all the Company's shareholders.

"I appeal to all Frenchmen, to all my associates whose fortunes are threatened. I have devoted my life to two great works, which were pronounced to be impossibilities—the Suez and Panama Canals. The Suez Canal is constructed, and has enriched France. If you wish to complete the Panama Canal, your chance is in your own hands. *You must decide.*"

CHAPTER IV

SCANDAL !

CRITICAL weeks followed the announcement of the issue of the remainder of the Lottery Bonds which were to save the Panama undertaking if only 400,000 out of a million were taken up. Would the shareholders, would the public, respond? It was the sublime gambler's last throw—and it failed. Tragedy, stark and overwhelming, lies behind the bald statement of the facts given to us by a writer in *Hazell's Annual*.

“ The Panama Loan Subscription closed at Paris on December 12. . . . On the following evening, the Company published a note, referring to the good impression produced in the financial world by the spirit shown by the shareholders and bondholders, in subscribing for securities which could be obtained on the market at as much as a hundred francs cheaper than those offered. On the same day the question came before the Cabinet, when two schemes were submitted—one for the formation of a new Company, interest to be deferred till the canal was working; the other securing the existence of the old as well as a new Company on certain terms, and interest to both Companies to be deferred till the completion of the canal. M. de Lesseps was under-

stood to be in favour of the latter scheme, but no decision was arrived at by the Cabinet Council. On December 13, the Panama Canal Company suspended payment, the notice posted up at the offices stating that the subscriptions had not extended to 400,000 obligations, while those that had been received would be returned. A special meeting of the Cabinet was at once held, and, to prevent speculation on the Bourse, its decision, to propose a three months' suspension of payment, was placarded. At a subsequent meeting of the Chamber the same day, a Bill was brought in to this effect, and urgency was carried by 333 to 155 votes. In the evening it was announced that M. de Lesseps and his colleagues had resigned their posts as administrators of the Company, and that at their request the Tribunal of the Seine had appointed three judicial liquidators, MM. Hué, Baudelot, and De Normandie."

That was a black Christmas for thousands in France, and for none more than De Lesseps himself. Yet the flame was still alive in his soul: he did not yet despair. Outwardly resigned to the wreck of all his plans, his brain was still scheming, revolving and revolving some means to cheat the fate that threatened to close his career in ignominy. In all his thoughts now was the canal, his canal. The work must go on. This could not be the end. He would form a new Company. It would take over the assets of the old Company. There had been mistakes. They would be rectified. Meanwhile patience. He had learned to wait. Even now,

old as he was, with Death standing at his elbow, he could still show them how to wait. It was a magnificent exhibition of the triumph of mind over body.

But the months wore on, and progress was very slow. It did not seem as if capital for the new Company would be forthcoming. Could he hold out? From New York in July, 1899, came a letter from a well-wisher, Sir William Russell. It brought a thin ray of light into a mind that was sinking slowly down into the darkness.

“Since visiting the work of the Panama Canal,” wrote Sir William, “and having mourned over it, being here on the way from the Pacific Coast of South America, I have always desired to write to you. I was astounded by what I saw. I was angry at the idea that such false reports about the nature and progress of the work should have been spread abroad. Naturally, I am not an engineer, but the progress of the work appeared clearly before my eyes and free from the difficulties that I saw you overcome at the Salt Lakes, for example. I was surprised to find the work so far advanced. The surprise, however, was mingled with sorrow and pity in considering that the vast enterprise was in suspense. So many unproductive millions! Silence and solitude where there should be active life and the utilization of so much capital, industry, and thought! I cannot believe that this waste will last. It would be a dishonour for France and a loss for the whole world if the canal were not cut. For my own part, I am sure that it must be finished. I have heard repeated *ad nauseam* the old story about the lack of traffic, and about catastrophes and natural obstacles.

I have replied to those who relate these stories that I had already heard the same objections made with even more force and upon greater authority before you accomplished the opening of the Suez Canal. I was told a great deal about the speculation of the contractors, the prodigalities and thoughtless expenditures, and negligence in the supervision. I could not form an opinion as to the value of these reports, but I was able to see that there was, from one end of the canal to the other, a wealth of machinery of all kinds—elevators, drags, lighters, steamboats—in short, a complete flotilla ready to start at the first sign, except what had been destroyed by bad usage or negligence. I cannot help writing to you to tell you of my sympathy and hope. I pray that you may live to see finished and accomplished the *opus maximum* of your existence, so fertile in great works.'

De Lesseps had retired to Chesnaye now, leaving his devoted son Charles to represent him in Paris, Charles who had warned him so earnestly of the mistake he was making in embarking on the Panama Canal, but who loyally said no word of rebuke and tried to attract to himself the growing force of public hostility.

The old man went abroad but little, enfeebled as he was by his advanced age and weighed down by cares. For the most part he sat in his armchair, skull-cap on head, a rug across his knees, gazing steadily into the flames that danced about the consuming coals. Seven young children were still with him at home, and sometimes their laughter, or the coming of a rare visitor, roused him from his lethargic condition and elicited flashes of his old wit and charm of conversation. His

wife, so much his junior, ministered tenderly to all his wants, and brought an appreciative smile to the thin lips and a sparkle to the dark glowing eyes. But for hours at a time he saw only with the inward vision, and no one could tell what thoughts chased each other through his brain. Pictures out of the long past must have come and gone, of scenes in many lands, and of the multitude of persons whom he had known, the conflicts and the triumphs. He was the onlooker now at a play which he could scarcely believe had been his own life.

So one might have hoped that peace would come at last to the scarred warrior. But it was not to be. In August, 1891, the five-hundred franc shares of the Panama Company were being quoted at twenty-seven and a half francs. Public indignation was roused to fever pitch, and letters of complaint poured in on the Public Prosecutor insisting that an inquiry should be held into the conduct of De Lesseps and his associates. As a result domiciliary visits were paid to the residences of the former directors. The officials called at Chesnaye, but De Lesseps was kept in ignorance of their coming. He was practically insensible now to all that was going on around him.

On October 24th the Procureur-Général reported that the evidence at present was insufficient to enable him to determine whether there were grounds for criminal proceedings to be taken, and the examining magistrate, M. Prinet, was required to investigate further.

De Lesseps was at this time lying ill at his Paris residence in the Avenue Montaigne, and it was there

that a summons arrived calling him to present himself for interrogation. G. Barnett Smith thus describes the pathetic scene that followed. "The members of his family and a few faithful friends met in consultation, and decided to break the news to him as gently as possible. According to a correspondent of the *Standard*, as soon as he understood the matter, M. de Lesseps rose in his bed, and called for his clothes and his Grand Cordon of the Legion of Honour. Those who were present at the scene said they could never forget the marvel then witnessed. The old man, who only a few minutes before had seemed unable to move for weakness, got out of bed, dressed himself in haste, put on his Grand Cordon, and descended the stairs without assistance. What occurred at the interview between himself and M. Prinet is not known in all its details; but M. de Lesseps defended not only his management of the Canal Company, but of the canal itself. The shock was too much for him, however. He returned home, went to bed, and was seized with fever. The next day he said to his wife, 'What a terrible nightmare I have had! I imagined I was summoned before the examining magistrate; it was atrocious.' By degrees he became conscious that it was not a dream; but from that time forward he ceased to speak of Panama, and relapsed into his former irresponsible condition."

On November 15th, France, and the whole civilised world, was startled by the news that the Government through its legal advisers had decided to prosecute De Lesseps and those concerned with him in the Panama Canal Company for "the use of fraudulent devices

for creating belief in the existence of a chimerical event and of an imaginary credit, the squandering of sums accruing from issues handed to them for a fixed purpose, and the swindling of others out of all or part of their fortunes." Those who stood to face these charges were De Lesseps, his son Charles, Baron Cottu, M. Marius Fontane, M. Eiffel, and Baron Jacques Reinach.

The Panama Scandal was now on every tongue, and occupied a prominent position in the newspapers. Excited groups of citizens gathered in boulevard and café to discuss the case, and the eminent persons implicated. Widespread sympathy with the principal figure was openly expressed. It seemed a crying shame that the old man who had brought such honour to the name of Frenchman should thus be pilloried and his own name dragged in the mire. If legal action had to be taken, why had it not been taken sooner? That was the question posited by *The Times*. "If M. de Lesseps had been brought to trial when the Panama Canal Company stopped payment four years before, when a host of small investors saw their savings swept ruthlessly away, and when the inextinguishable optimism of the great projector continued to weave new devices and excite new hopes that were seen to be illusory, there would have been a strong public opinion in favour of meting out swift and stern justice to all those responsible, whether through incompetence or something worse, for bringing widespread disaster into thousands of French homes." Surely, it was rather late in the day now to indict a man almost on his deathbed, and utterly incapable of defending himself.

Mme. de Lesseps took up the cudgels on behalf of her husband and wrote a scathing letter that appeared in the *Gaulois*, in which she stigmatised as uncharitable and unchristian the statements of a writer who had suggested that De Lesseps had prolonged his life unduly. There was no crime in age, and the old man was still dear to herself and her children.

Then events suddenly took a turn, which for a time deflected public interest from the person of De Lesseps. Rumours which had been rife began to take the concrete form of definite accusations against highly placed government officials declared to have been bribed and corrupted by the Panama Canal Company. At a session of the French Chamber the Deputy M. Delahaye alleged that three millions of francs had been divided among 150 members to secure their support for the Company's loan issue. The uproar that attended this dramatic pronouncement was tremendous. The Panama case was immediately elevated to a first-class political issue, where all the passions of rival parties were let loose. The Premier, M. Loubet, in the midst of the excitement gave his assent to the demand for an inquiry. A vote was taken, and it was agreed by a narrow majority to appoint a special Committee of 33 members to investigate the allegations.

The next day Paris was seething with the wildest gossip, and the most sensational statements gained credence. Would all the facts come out? Whose head would fall?

The restrained comments of the *Temps*, which are a better guide than the more hysterical sections of the Press, testify clearly enough to the gravity of the

situation and the political capital which was being made of it.

"The interpellations on the Panama business," says this newspaper, "could hardly have ended differently. It was necessary at any price to get out of the shadows haunted by intangible and yet menacing phantoms, where all suspicions seemed permissible. It was necessary to bring accusers and accused face to face, to let the light in upon this thick smoke, to define what was vague and fleeting; and to accomplish all this there was only the way which has been chosen. Yet from the political point of view, the only one which here interests us, it is permissible to ask if the advantages looked for in a parliamentary inquiry at all make up for the inconveniences. It is, in the first place, a strange thing to see the matter brought simultaneously before the Court of Appeal and a Parliamentary Committee. To be sure, the two inquiries are not directed at the same facts nor the same persons. But it will be sometimes a very difficult and delicate thing to draw the distinctions between the obligations belonging to the first and those belonging to the second. A more disquieting aspect of the situation is the political consequences which all the noise and base passions which will be raised in this inquiry may have for the Republic and for the country. Legends are so easily created in the popular imagination, and eradicated with so much difficulty. Think of the rancour of the vanquished parties, and the political capital which they will make out of this business for electoral

purposes and revenge! Of this we have already had a foretaste. The accusers must certainly be heard, but they must be made to understand that, in formulating their accusations, they at the same time are bound to prove them."

The sudden death of Baron Reinach on November 20th introduced an element of mystery into the subsequent proceedings. It did seem an extraordinary thing that one of the accused men, whose evidence was of the utmost importance, should have passed away naturally on the eve of prosecution. The medical testimony was definite that the Baron had died of apoplexy, though it was rumoured strongly that it was a case of suicide, or even murder. A still wilder assertion was considered by the Committee, that there was no corpse in the coffin, only stones, and that in reality the Baron was still alive, a refugee from justice. The fevered political demand for victims was ready to attach credence to the most fantastic reports, and on November 28th in the Chamber of Deputies the Marquis de la Ferronaye rose to question M. Ricard, Minister of Justice, on the circumstances of the Baron's death, and to demand an exhumation.

In reply the Minister "urged that all the proper formalities had been observed. The public commissary saw the coffin closed, the Prefect of the Seine authorised the burial at Beauvais, and the Procureur sent, not for the family doctor, but for the registration doctor, who certified that the body bore no marks of violence, and that, according to the information furnished him, death

was due to apoplexy. Autopsy, he contended, was not intended to satisfy curiosity, however legitimate, and was not even warranted in the case of suicide—which was not a legal offence—but was justified solely by suspicion of crime. Having no such suspicion, he declined to go beyond the law. If to-morrow, or next week, or next month, he entertained suspicions, he should act accordingly. Or if the Panama Committee believed there was any presumption of crime, let it say so, and justice would set itself in motion. M. Ricard next explained why seals had not been placed on the deceased's effects. Baron Reinach had been interrogated in the Panama case, but he had not been summoned, and his death prevented his being included in the prosecution. It was true that the investigating magistrate in this case, M. Prinet, terminated his mission on the 19th, the day before Baron Reinach's death, and neither the Minister of Justice nor the Procureur had the right of domiciliary visit or seizure of papers. M. Prinet, by his instructions, had made the closest investigation, and he himself had not hesitated an instant to order a prosecution, for at all costs justice should be equal for all. His colleagues had agreed with him, and he was proud of the insults now heaped on him for doing his duty. He was resolved by all legal means to have the fullest light on the affair, but however desirous of satisfying the Chamber, he declined to go beyond what was legal."

But this reasonable reply was not what was wanted. M. Brisson, Chairman of the Panama Committee, associated himself with the demand for an exhumation. What was wanted, he declared, was to search for a

legal procedure that would enable the Minister to authorise an exhumation, not to evade it.

The Premier, M. Loubet, mounted the Tribune amidst growing excitement. The Government stood by every word that M. Ricard had said. They intended to give every assistance to the Panama Committee in its inquiry, but they were not going to be bullied, or go beyond what was strictly legal. His speech was punctuated with interruptions, and eventually the Government was defeated on M. Brisson's motion that the Chamber shared in the desire expressed by its Committee of Inquiry.

From this time the initiative passed to the Panama Committee. It carried on its business in the way that it chose, and even succeeded in getting Baron Reinach's body exhumed, and an autopsy made, though nothing came of it. It was a case of the tail wagging the dog. As the inquiry proceeded, more and more persons became involved in the scandal, and the wildest attacks were made in the Press, notably on M. Rouvier, the Minister of Finance, and on M. Clémenceau. The whole affair was getting out of hand, and the business of government brought into disrepute.

“ Since yesterday,” stated the *Temps* on December 11th, “ it has been clear to all eyes that the Government is no longer where it seems to be, and where it ought really to be according to the Constitution. It is no longer the Cabinet which is directing affairs or taking the responsibility of them. The Government has passed, as a matter of fact, into the Committee of Inquiry, and upon that Committee the Ministers, declared by the Constitution to be

responsible, are throwing the responsibility of the policy to which they seem resigned. In itself this would always be a serious evil. But, over and above general objections, is the Committee in the least fitted to assume this responsibility? By no means, for it contains political parties and interests quite divergent, whose sole anxiety is to profit by everything which happens. Examine what is going on in this Committee, the too faithful image of the Chamber. There is no doubt a majority which might seize on the inquiry and direct it to the profit of the Republic. But, in reality, the majority, as well as the Ministry, obeys and does not command. It is at the mercy of the minority, which is trying to exploit this inquiry only against the Republic. This minority, sometimes even one or two rather resolute members, have only to accuse with loud voice their Republican colleagues of wishing to smother the light, in order to terrorise them immediately, and to make them take a road which they would not wish to travel. Thus one needs no magnifying-glass to see what we shall call the most effective of tyrannies of the minority over the general policy of the country. The minority, indeed, drags with it the entire Chamber, which drags the Ministry. Where can such a Government and such a majority, bound hand and foot by their most deadly foes, be said to be going?"

On December 15th there was another stormy debate in the Chamber, when a Bill was discussed authorising the grant to the Panama Committee of judicial powers which it had not hitherto possessed. M. Brisson,

President of the Panama Committee, said that the Committee itself was not asking for these powers as the Government was giving every assistance to the inquiry, and he moved that the debate be adjourned. If, however, the House decided in favour of discussing the Bill, he and his colleagues would support the measure. It was clearly seen that matters had reached a point where the Government must make a stand, or acknowledge its subservience to the Committee. Such a Bill having been put forward, there could be no adjournment.

M. Bourgeois, now Minister of Justice, asked what was the object of the measure. It proposed to transfer the executive power of the Government to the hands of a Committee of the Chamber, and the latter would act independently of the Cabinet, although it was on the latter's responsibility that the executive power would be administered. The proposal struck a blow at the most sacred rights of the citizens, in transferring this power from the Government, which was responsible to the country, to a body which was responsible to no one. He went on to declare that such a state of things could not be tolerated for a moment, and he warned the House that in voting for the adjournment of the debate, it would not be simply voting on a question of parliamentary procedure, but on the very existence of the Republic itself. They had to deal with a carefully-planned campaign, which consisted in distilling calumny, drop by drop, day after day. In presence of such tactics as these, the duty of Republicans was union. The Government would not remain in office if the vote for adjournment was successful.

After further heated discussion, in the course of which M. Brisson refused to withdraw his motion, it was put to the vote and the Government won by a large majority. In the end, the Bill itself was thrown out by a majority of six.

We have dwelt at some length on these political circumstances because they directly affected the position of the Panama defendants. Originally the principal judge in the Court of Appeal had postponed the hearing of the case until January 10th, 1893, "with engagements for all the defendants to appear on that date. But," the judge had added, "I make some reserves in the case of M. de Lesseps, as being ill." Now, as a result of the accusations which had been brought before the Committee of Inquiry, the Government decided to institute proceedings forthwith against Charles de Lesseps, Henri Cottu, Marius Fontane, and Sans Leroy, on the test charge of corrupting public functionaries. The penalty for persons convicted of giving or receiving bribes in order to obtain contracts, distinctions, or other favours from the public authorities, was from one to five years' imprisonment, which might be reduced to a few months imprisonment if the offer of a bribe had had no effect. This was an altogether different charge from that of swindling which the Panama Directors were required to answer, but three of them were concerned in these fresh proceedings.

The action followed immediately upon the Panama Committee's challenge to the Government in the debate of the 15th. The Premier and the Minister of Justice left the Chamber of Deputies, and went at once to set

the law in motion for the issue of the warrants. By instituting these proceedings the Government was asserting its authority, demonstrating that it would not submit to the dictation of the Committee, and establishing that it had nothing to conceal, but was determined that justice and truth should prevail.

The warrants were executed without delay. Charles de Lesseps was arrested at his house at seven o'clock in the morning of the 16th, and the arrest of all the others except Baron Cottu, who was in Vienna, followed. The Baron returned to Paris later and gave himself up on hearing of the proceedings. The prisoners were lodged in separate cells, and were not allowed to see each other or their friends. Later, evidence of their identification was taken, and they were remanded in prison until the case came on.

Ferdinand de Lesseps at Chesnaye knew nothing of what had taken place, and he was kept in ignorance as long as possible. He himself had fortunately been spared the disgrace of arrest. Few believed that either father or son had been guilty of anything more than yielding to the representations of financiers like Reinach, who claimed to be able to exercise influence on the Government, at a time when there was urgent need of official support in order to obtain money in carrying on the work of the Panama Canal. Mme. de Lesseps told an interviewer: "I am a fatalist, as my husband has always been. . . . One has to believe that events follow in their preordained order. . . . I am certain of one thing only, and that is the inflexible and absolute probity of my husband and his sons."

Numerous papers and documents had been seized by

the State at the residences of the accused and others, and as a result the crowning sensation of the Panama drama took place. On the 20th of December in the Chamber of Deputies the President read out the following letter from M. Tanon, the Procureur-Général:

“ I have the honour to apply to you for authorisation to prosecute members of the Chamber of Deputies. A criminal investigation was recently opened against MM. Charles de Lesseps, Fontane, Cottu, Sans Leroy, and any others whom the investigation might have involved, on the charge of corruption of public functionaries within the meaning of Articles 177 and 179 of the Penal Code, for acts relating to the issue of Lottery Bonds of the Panama Company in 1888. In the course of that investigation, the magistrate has seized a certain number of cheque counterfoils bearing the initials of names, several of which appear to be those of Deputies now forming part of Parliament. In these circumstances, it is necessary that the Deputies in question should be summoned by the magistrates to offer their explanations in the form provided. I have consequently the honour of asking the Chamber to be good enough to suspend parliamentary privilege as regards MM. Emanuel Arène, Dugué de la Fauconnerie, Antonin Proust, Jules Roche, and Rouvier.”

The same letter, with the requisite alterations, was read in the Senate by the President, the Senators concerned being MM. Béral, Albert Grévy, Léon Renault,

Devès, and Thévenet. Of the five Senators and five Deputies involved five were ex-Ministers, so that it may be imagined that excitement at this development was by no means confined to France. Was the whole fabric of the Republic to be rent in twain? One has to recall the circumstances of the more recent Stavisky case to form a conception of the commotion caused in its day by the Panama Scandal, the scare headlines, the keen controversy, and the violent and misplaced judgments.

Reassuring at such a juncture was the bluff and common-sense statement of Emile Zola in an interview given to the Vienna *Deutsche Zeitung*.

“ It is an affair which will have no further consequences. What, indeed, has this scandal divulged that is new? The whole thing is a well-known story, and one which is common to all Europe. The only difference is that our eager and restless Press deals in broad daylight with what in other countries is simply hushed up. It is in our character to get excited and to do everything hastily; whereas in your own country, Germany, and also in Italy, the greatest discretion is observed. Our politics are as honest as any in Europe. You know very well that the French-woman is just as honest, that she is just as virtuous a girl, and quite as faithful a wife, and good mother and daughter, as those of any other country. But we have a Press and a literature that thirsts for facts, that fanatically and with circumspection ferrets into every corner of human corruption, revealing what in your country is carefully concealed. I ask you, what

does the Panama affair prove? That politics cost money; that you take money where you can get it; and that all parliamentary groups have their own financial friends behind them. Do you believe it is different in any country in Europe? It is certainly mean; but politics are precisely a very dirty business, and will always remain so. It may be a fault, but it may also be a virtue, for us to wash our dirty linen in the presence of all Europe. The Republic is strong enough to take such a liberty without incurring any danger. I have firm confidence in the security of our future, which can only be furthered by the severity of our self-criticism. We possess the most laborious and honest officials, the most honourable and fearless Press, while our Parliamentarians are no worse than their business obliges them to be. The Royalist hopes are ridiculous, and the victory of Socialism, in which I believe, is not yet at hand. The present Republic will pursue its course in peace."





CHAPTER V

THE TRIALS

THE trial of the Panama Company Directors opened in the Paris Court of Appeal on January 10th, 1893. The principal indictment was against Ferdinand de Lesseps, his son Charles, and Baron Cottu, accusing them of having conjointly within three years from the commencement of the legal proceedings "employed fraudulent manoeuvres to induce belief in unreal schemes, and to raise imaginary hopes of the realisation of a chimerical event, with the object of obtaining from various persons subscriptions, followed by the payment of money on the occasion of the issue of bonds made on June 26, 1888, and by those means with having embezzled a portion or all the fortune of third parties."

What an echo was here of the sarcastic statements of Lord Palmerston nearly forty years before. Then it was the Suez Canal that was the chimera, and its indomitable advocate pronounced a charlatan and a swindler. Had De Lesseps not proved then by his grit and perseverance, and the force of his personality, that to associate anything dishonourable with his name was the grossest libel? Suez was no chimera, as all the world admitted when he had completed it successfully. Why apply that legendary word now to the Panama

scheme? Where was the difference? The one undertaking in its own way was as feasible as the other. Because an old man has not sufficiently counted the cost, that does not make his work chimerical. And only twenty-one years were to pass from the date of this trial before the second chimera was to become a fact, and the Panama Canal, completed by America following De Lesseps' route, would be open to the shipping of the nations.

De Lesseps' tragedy and misfortune was due to the inevitable accident of advancing years. In carrying out his first enterprise he had had the wit to keep out of the clutches of the financiers, and he had been able to exercise a personal supervision over the work. This time he had to control his undertaking from a distance, and he did not know sufficient of what was going on. Faced with a demand for money in ever more fabulous sums, if his plans were to bear fruit, he allowed his Company to resort to those who seemed to be somewhat, and through whose influence he believed that the financial obstacles in his path would be removed, but who were only using the drive of his idealism to feather their own nests. He sought nothing for himself, but everything for humanity. Could such a man be called a swindler? When the breath of such a suspicion had come upon him, he had risen fearlessly from his bed and tottered manfully forth to meet the calumny and defend his honour.

Now he could rise no more. When his name was called to answer to the indictment there came no response. Ferdinand de Lesseps lay insensible at Chesnaye, and the voice of the Clerk of the Court

could not penetrate that deadened ear. Amidst a profound silence the Advocate-General applied for judgment by default, and it was given despite the fact that a medical certificate had been lodged showing the state of his health.

The trial proceeded. It was all about money. Charles de Lesseps bore himself proudly and fearlessly. He had endeavoured to dissuade his father from the undertaking; but when he had made up his mind, he had determined to stand by him, and he had never regretted it.

He was questioned about the sums of money paid out to various persons, including an amount of 375,000 francs paid to M. Baïhaut, Minister of Public Works, presumably for aid in getting the Lottery Loan Bill through the Chamber.

The Advocate-General: "This money was given for an illegal purpose."

Charles de Lesseps: "No, it was like the purse or watch which one hands over, at the edge of a wood, when a knife is presented at one's throat."

The President: "You could call the police."

Charles de Lesseps: "But what if it is the policeman himself who is staging the hold-up?"

The trial dragged on, piling up evidence not of fraudulent intent by the Directors, but revealing the financial toils which had been woven about them by the money-spiders. The whole affair had assumed such gigantic proportions that they had lost long before the end of the Company's struggles all sense of proportion. It was obvious that they had not been able to face up to the facts, but had gone on paying out enormous sums

like a blackmailed person, always living in hopes that the favours handed out to keep them sweet would eventually enable them to extricate the undertaking from its embarrassments. They had not known when to call a halt; but had taken a desperate gambler's chance with the money entrusted to them in order to salve the money entrusted by others, or by the same people, and which was already lost.

On January 17th, the Advocate-General began his address for the prosecution.

“ Gentlemen, it is with feelings of the deepest distress that I rise to speak in this case. You are called upon to judge men whose past is without reproach, who have occupied high social positions, and of whom some have conceived and carried out immense undertakings which have in a measure contributed to the glory of their country. I had been hoping that the course of this long trial would have given them the opportunity, in view of what they stated, of justifying themselves and making plain their innocence in the sight of all beholders. That, unfortunately, has not happened, and I find myself forced not to invite your justice to bring in a verdict of rehabilitation, but to bring in a verdict of condemnation and disgrace.

“ Among those who are before you, there is one whose personality overshadows the others by a peculiar eminence. I should have liked, for my own part, to be able to pass over him whose age and infirmity has kept him away from this audience, and who has not had to undergo these discomforts. This man has had too great a confidence in his destiny, in his superiority, in his star. He has launched, and has wished proudly

to persist in the tragic adventure which has wrecked his fortune and his honour. This 'Grand Frenchman,' who has walked with monarchs as almost their equal, has not been willing to recognise his own error. His obstinacy has led him on and reduced him to the most guilty expedients; supported by his lieutenants, he has hurled millions into the gulf and piled up wreckage in his wake, in the course of which scandalous fortunes have been built up on the one hand, while the wretched victims have been set at defiance."

There followed a long catalogue of the devices resorted to without justification to raise funds and secure benefits for the Company.

"All the time," cried the Advocate-General, "we are having Suez quoted at us, but Suez on the contrary offered a salutary warning. . . . It is to the chorus of 'just like Suez' that French savings have been swallowed up in this unfortunate enterprise." While "he had no desire to discourage efforts at reconstruction," he had no hesitation in describing Panama "as the greatest swindle of modern times."

On the following day he wound up his speech for the prosecution by demanding against the prisoners the heaviest sentence allowed by the law.

Then Maître Barboux, counsel for Ferdinand de Lesseps and his son, began his address for the defence. He is described as "short, and spare of frame, his pointed features adorned with a fringe of white whiskers, his eyes bright and often ironical, a skilled dialectician, radiating intense conviction in his client's good faith." He set to work systematically to demolish the damning edifice built up by the Advocate-General.

“ Gentlemen, I am too impatient to reach a discussion of the accusations levelled against the Messrs. de Lesseps, to allow myself to indulge in preliminary observations. There never was a more needless case than this one. The inception of the enterprise, the hopes to which it gave rise, the difficulties which had to be overcome, the successive alterations which these increasing obstacles imposed on the administration, the public timidity manifested since 1884, the great loan of 1888 and its failure owing to the weak response of the lenders and at the same time to the publicity which exposed the risks with which the enterprise had still to contend, the failure, due not to the impracticability of the undertaking, but to financial problems, in short this wreck has come about, as you would expect, out of the arena of party politics. The public knows all this, all of it, even the chaos of ministerial deliberations from whence the chase has started and which, by the inflexible logic of things, has brought us to the position where we are to-day.”

The Advocate-General had spoken of chimeras. You might as well call a chimera every great adventure which did not succeed. Pity the people which ceased to be inspired by such chimeras! Counsel spoke ironically of “the universal competence of the expert,” which would weigh so precisely all the technical possibilities; but when one came to judge responsibility one could not do it “with the quiet patience of an entomologist.” He defied the Minister Public to prove “the criminal bad faith” of his client. Two experts and the liquidator had examined one after another, with the result that they had found everything in the

strictest order. As to the trustworthiness of those now before the Court, that had emerged from the hands of the experts, of the liquidator, of instructing counsel, and even of the Advocate-General himself, absolutely intact.

The Advocate-General had thrown doubt on Ferdinand de Lesseps' disinterestedness. Was it realised, that this man through whose hands millions had passed, would leave a fortune only sufficient to guarantee to his dependants an income of 3,000 francs a year? As to his son Charles he had been working for a comparatively small salary for years.

"I would, Gentlemen, that I might bring Ferdinand de Lesseps before you in an armchair, but I know in advance the spectacle to which you would be treated. This whole audience would rise to make room in our midst for that glory, and that misfortune. Perchance a sudden awakening would arouse for an instant that noble intelligence, perhaps he would realise, as in a flash, the horror of that scene, perhaps one would hear him cry out in protest against the men who would attack his honour and that of his son, but he is fallen into a state from which there is no recovery. . . . I can therefore speak of him freely, seeing that he will rest shortly in his tomb. There is no man easier to comprehend and to depict. Put together a spirit of adventure and an incredible daring, a dauntless tenacity, and a passionate love for his country's glory, and there you have in three words the whole character of the man."

On the third day of his pleading Maître Barboux

dealt with the threefold charge of fraud, attempted fraud, and abuse of confidence.

He showed how difficult it had been out of eight years' files of the Company's house organ to find anything that could be interpreted as having even remotely a fraudulent intention. What was there after all more than the highly coloured language and extravagances common to all advertising? And far from the Company having deceived the public by false statements and premises, they had, on the contrary, scrupulously set forth the difficulties with which the enterprise was faced, and which it was necessary to overcome.

"If M. de Lesseps has sinned, it is by excessive optimism. But it is only the optimists who are any good for such a business. The pessimists are only spectators, they sit on the edge of the road looking on at the deeds of others and pointing out their mistakes. Left to them humanity would mark time and never go forward. . . .

"There were two things which the Directors of the Company owed to their shareholders and to the public: devotion and loyalty. Devotion? They had given them their lives. As to probity, they had come out unscathed from this gruelling examination.

"But apart from this probity, what was the fundamental of all communal existence which these shareholders, these bondholders, were demanding of this old man of seventy-four? They knew well enough that he was neither a financier, nor an engineer; but they were demanding of him three things which they could not do without: his name, his daring, and his star.

“ His name, already in his lifetime had earned that immortality which the records of man assure to those who, whether by labour or by blood, change the face of the world. His daring, which had achieved Suez, and do not forget that it was the miracle of Suez out of which came the failure of Panama. His star, that is to say the fortuitous circumstances which brought together the right people at the right time.

“ Well, if you will, the star has paled, the daring is defeated, but the name? . . . You seem to forget, Mr. Advocate-General, that for a long time now that name has ceased to belong to M. de Lesseps; it belongs to you, to us, to all France. You forget also, how some years ago when this old man still active crossed the frontier, the populace threw themselves in front of him, unharnessed the horses, drew his carriage themselves, and cried, not ‘ Long live Lesseps! ’ but ‘ Long live France! ’ Yes, and you, still further forget, that when he proceeded to foreign Courts, the kings, and even that old Emperor whom we have so cruelly defeated and humiliated, rose up to come to him. And what they greeted in his person was the embodiment of the genius of our race, a race passionate and generous, scattering with lavish hand the discoveries and the ideas of which it would never receive the fruit, prodigal of its own gold, as of its own blood, as it has striven to serve the cause of humanity. It is that which they greeted in the person of M. de Lesseps, and it is that, Mr. Advocate-General, which your hands, your hands honestly criminal, are endeavouring to tarnish.”

Prolonged applause broke out at the conclusion of this impassioned speech.

Counsel for the other defendants then addressed the court. Meanwhile in the Judicial Chamber of Paris on February 7th three of those concerned, Charles de Lesseps, Fontane, and Cottu, were being committed to the Assizes on a bribery charge together with a number of Deputies and ex-Deputies, and it is a question how far the Government's determination to clean up politics affected the judgment of the Court of Appeal in the Panama case. On the 8th the Government, in the Chamber of Deputies, accepted a motion that "The Chamber being resolved to support the Government in the repression of all acts of corruption, and being determined to prevent the recurrence of administrative practices which it reprehends, passes to the order of the day." It was on the 9th that judgment was to be given in the Fraud Trial.

The President's summing up was a lengthy one, but it was noticeable that it was throughout adverse to the defendants. No one of those present, however, and least of all the prisoners and their counsel, expected the severe sentence that was passed eventually. Indeed, there were loud murmurs of dissent when the President announced that the sentences would be the maximum penalty of five years imprisonment and a fine of 3,000 francs for Ferdinand de Lesseps (by default) and Charles de Lesseps, two years' imprisonment and 2,000 francs fine in the case of Cottu and Fontane, and two years' imprisonment and 20,000 francs fine in the case of Eiffel.

When he heard the sentence on his father Charles de Lesseps broke down and wept. Maître Barboux exclaimed in a fury "that he would never plead again

before such people," and immediately gave notice of appeal.

As soon as the news was published there was widespread dissatisfaction with the verdict. In France, and indeed throughout the world it was felt that the "Grand Frenchman" might have been spared this final ignominy. Hundreds of letters and telegrams expressing sympathy poured into La Chesnaye; but mercifully the principal figure was oblivious to all that was going on. In an interview given to a representative of the *Figaro* Mme. de Lesseps said:

"Well, I prefer this result. It is a fitting climax that both father and son should be condemned, and the very enormity of such a scandal will better protect our honour than less thorough-going injustice. I have no need of consolation, for I have reached the end of my Calvary. Nevertheless, there is one thing above all that I cannot forgive them; it is that, before striking at such a man, they should have waited until physical infirmity rendered it impossible for him to defend himself. It is better, however, that M. de Lesseps should not be in a condition to realise the frightful blow that has fallen upon him. I have still enough faith left to hope, and this is the supreme consolation that God has left to me. Yet when I think of Ferdinand de Lesseps being in gaol, I really ask myself whether I must not be dreaming. The slur which this sentence seeks to cast upon our name will, however, fail to affect us, for no-one will doubt the good faith of Ferdinand de Lesseps."

In brief moments of consciousness De Lesseps had several times asked for his son, whom with the querul-

ness of age he accused of abandoning him, knowing nothing of all that that son had been enduring in defending his own and his father's honour. A few days later, however, Charles de Lesseps was allowed to visit the old man, accompanied by two police officers: his wife also went with him. The party reached Issodun, the nearest station, at night, and drove at once to La Chesnaye, a distance of fifteen miles. A published description of the visit supplies the details that follow.

"It was in the early morning that they arrived, and were received by members of the family, and two or three friends. Towards five o'clock all retired to their several rooms, but only three hours later, M. Charles de Lesseps was up again and ready to see his father. The old man was still in bed, and had by his side several newspapers of February of last year, which he was trying to read. 'Good morning, father,' he said. 'I have been able to leave my work, and here I am.' 'Ah, Charles, it is you,' he replied. 'Is there nothing new in Paris?' Then he kissed his son, still saying, 'Ah, Charles! ah, Charles!' This was all, for he fell back almost immediately into his customary state of semi-consciousness, from time to time fixing his eyes on those present. The Countess was present at the interview, while the inspectors were just outside the door. At about nine, when the children had breakfasted, M. Charles de Lesseps took a walk with them. During this walk he told a reporter that he had given up hoping to be allowed to revisit La Chesnaye. 'I have very rarely let a week go by,' he continued, 'without coming to see my father, whom I all but worship.'

He could scarcely help being surprised at my long absence; and the Paris doctor who examined him the other day asserted that if I stayed away another week, it was to be feared that his wish to embrace me might become such a fixed idea as to bring on a fever, which might prove fatal. Now that he has seen me, he will be at ease about me for another two or three weeks. I complain of nothing, really of nothing, for I have a free conscience; and if this visit might be renewed, I should be very happy on my poor father's account.'

"During the morning, another son of M. Ferdinand de Lesseps arrived by train, and at the same time came the postman, with one hundred and two letters and nine telegrams. These were from all parts of Europe, and Madame de Lesseps expressed the consolation which she felt in the continued testimonies of affection and esteem which are now pouring in. M. Ferdinand de Lesseps took his accustomed place at the luncheon table. One of the inspectors sat also at this table, the other in another room with the children. M. Ferdinand de Lesseps ate a good luncheon, frequently falling half asleep, however, and resting his chin on the cane which he always carries now. From time to time he looked without saying a word at his two sons, Charles and Victor. Once he smiled at the former, and opened his lips as if about to speak, but finally said nothing. Towards the end of the luncheon he fell asleep. After the luncheon the old man was conducted to the adjoining room. He sat down with an old copy of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, always the same, and tried to read, but dropped continually to sleep. And so it is every day.

"In the afternoon a deputation from the neighbourhood came to present their respects to M. Charles de Lesseps. At five o'clock the family took another walk together, and later in the evening the prisoner returned to Paris."

The great Bribery Trial opened on March 9th, 1893, in the Assize Court of the Seine. The defendants were Charles de Lesseps and Marius Fontane, both Directors of the Panama Company, with whom were joined M. Baihaut, the former Minister of Public Works, Senator M. Béral, the Deputies and ex-Deputies Antonin Proust, Dugué de La Fauconnerie, Sans Leroy, and Gobron, and M. Baihaut's private secretary, M. Blondin. Emile Arton, the tenth defendant, was not in custody, though a warrant was out for his arrest.

We are mainly concerned here with the first day's proceedings, when Charles de Lesseps was examined at length by the President. The course of the interrogation based on the published reports of the trial has been ably summarised by G. Barnett Smith.

The preliminary formalities having been completed, M. Charles de Lesseps was examined by the President. The witness spoke with vivacity and firmness, and evidently directed himself towards the jurors, who were much struck by his frank and fearless attitude. He deposed that it was his father who first had the idea of piercing the Isthmus of Panama, and he (witness) was proud to be of use to him in the work. He was never anything but an official, and managed the business as Secretary-General. Asked why he had paid

M. Cornelius Herz 600,000 francs in 1885, when the Lottery appeal was broached, he replied, because of Herz's great influence with the Government, and his relations with M. Clémenceau. The witness continued: "I had every reason to believe that M. Herz was in high honour. His advancement in the Legion of Honour had been rapid. He wished to go with us into all sorts of affairs. One day, to convince me of his position, he asked me if I had ever seen Mont-sous-Vaudrey (the summer home of President Grévy). I replied 'No.' 'Very well,' said he, 'we will go there together if you like; you will then see on what terms I am with M. Grévy.' So we went. M. Herz was received as a friend of the house—so much so, indeed, that I had to admit that he possessed real power. The whole question with me was whether I should alienate M. Herz, the sleeping partner in *La Justice* and the frequenter of the Elysée, or whether, even at the cost of heavy sacrifices, I should win him over to us. When we began the canal, we did so on a comparatively simple scale, without syndicates and without advertising. People told us we were childish, that we must treat with the journals, three here and a hundred in the provinces. Insensibly we were led on to adopt the methods of securing publicity employed by everybody, and encouraged even by the Government."

The President here interjected, "Oh, leave the Government alone!" upon which there was great uproar in Court.

M. Charles de Lesseps then passed on to his relations with M. Baïhaut. According to the *Times*' correspondent, he remarked that he was at first incredulous as

to M. Baïhaut's demand. "See Blondin nevertheless," said M. Fontane. "I accordingly sent for Blondin, who said to me, 'I am only a Government agent. I am an honest man, and take none of the money, but you must now arrange with the Minister.' Thereupon I sent M. Fontane to see M. Baïhaut, and I afterwards saw M. Blondin, and an agreement was made for a million francs, 375,000 francs of which was given him on introducing the Bill. As the Bill did not pass, no further instalment was paid."

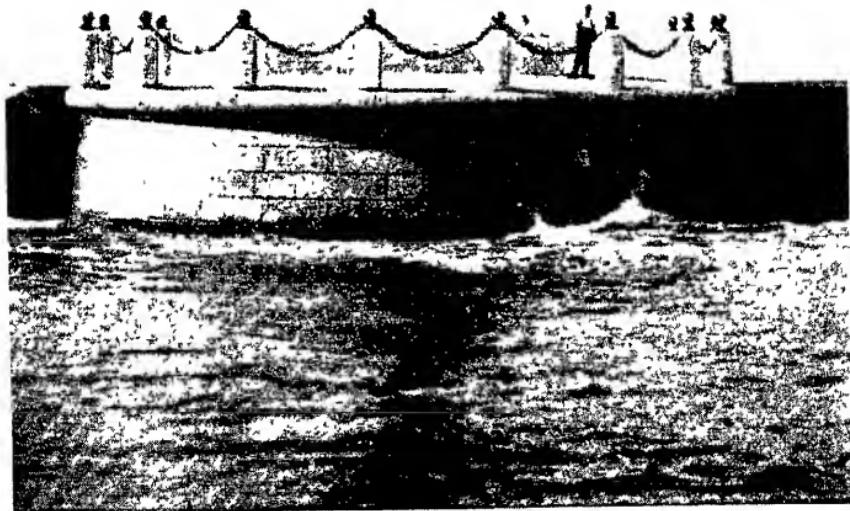
The President: "In all this I see no exaction or violence."

M. de Lesseps: "There was no means whatever of avoiding these exactions if I was to insure the introduction of the Bill. I believed at the time that the money was for Government purposes, and I did not consider till later what was really done with it."

Questioned next about Reinach, M. de Lesseps said: "I had known him since 1879, when he was one of the financiers who backed the first Panama Company, and on our taking over its Concession he continued his support. He had certain defects, but what he took up he went through with, and we had need of him in issuing the loans."

The President: "But his bank was not important enough to warrant your giving him more than five millions, especially as the Crédit Lyonnais had only 252,000 francs."

M. de Lesseps: "The 252,000 francs was simply the commission on sales. The Crédit Lyonnais had several millions besides this as its share in the syndicate. I offered Reinach five million francs as his share in the



THE STATUE OF FERDINAND DE LESSEPS AT PORT SAID

(By courtesy of the Suez Canal Company)

syndicate, but he replied: 'I require ten or twelve millions, which M. Herz demands of me, and you must extricate me.' I replied that I had not seen M. Herz for a long time, and that I had nothing to do with his affairs. Reinach seemed desperate. I added: 'He is insatiable. After you have given him ten or twelve millions, he will demand your whole fortune; and when he has got this, he will take your very overcoat and shirt, and will then tell you to stand on your head and walk from the Bastille to the Madeleine.' Shortly after this, M. de Freycinet sent for me. He told me he had heard of a suit against us from two leading politicians, and that I had better arrange the matter with Reinach. I informed M. de Freycinet that M. Herz was demanding twelve millions from Reinach. M. de Freycinet said he did not know the amount, and had nothing to do with it, but he recommended me to try to arrange the matter. Meanwhile M. Herz was flooding the newspapers with threatening telegrams, and M. Fontane received one also."

The President: "What was the result of your visit to M. de Freycinet?"

M. de Lesseps: "It was not to my interest to fall out with the Republican Government and the Ministers, and I did all I could for Reinach. M. Clémenceau sent for me too, and the conversation with him was much the same as with M. de Freycinet. Then the Minister of the Interior telephoned for my father to call on him. This was because my interviews with M. de Freycinet and M. Clémenceau had not had the results hoped for. I went with my father to the Minister of the Interior, and our conversation with M. Floquet

was substantially a repetition of the other two. On my saying that I had refused to be the intermediary between M. Herz and Reinach, M. Floquet said: 'I should do just the same in your place.'

The witness was next asked why he spoke of all these visits to M. de Franqueville, the examining magistrate, when he replied that he simply answered M. Franqueville's questions. Further interrogated, he said that in consequence of his (witness's) visit to M. de Freycinet, he gave Reinach five million francs. He had no knowledge how Reinach disposed of the money, except that he had given M. Herz two million francs to quiet him. He now believed that Reinach paid his own debts with the money.

M. de Lesseps was then questioned as to his relations with Arton, when he stated that he had made his acquaintance on the voyage to Aspinwall, and afterwards learned that he could do the Company service. Witness then continued: "Arton came to me on behalf of Floquet, and told me that the electoral campaign in the department of the Nord against Boulanger was very active. 'If,' he added, "you could render M. Floquet a service, and set aside 300,000 francs for a purpose which he will indicate, you will give him great pleasure.' I replied that Floquet must make the request himself. Next day Arton told me that M. Floquet wished to see me. I went to his house, and he substantially repeated what Arton had said, but not quite so bluntly. He added that if I could not make the sacrifice, his sentiments towards the Panama Company would not be changed on that account. I thought it would not be prudent to refuse an honourable gentle-

man a service of 300,000 francs. (Laughter.) When the time of settlement arrived, Arton brought me the request of M. Floquet, which referred to payments to be made to newspapers. But as I did not wish to exceed 300,000 francs, I remember having said to him, 'I will send you the bonds with the letter F in the corner, and when we have reached the 300,000 francs, you will put a stop to further expenditure.' (Loud and prolonged laughter.)

Witness added that this took place before the voting on the Panama Bill. The Court then adjourned.

The trial, which produced many sensational episodes reflected in stormy scenes in the Chamber of Deputies, continued for twelve days. The last five were occupied mainly with the speeches of defending Counsel. As in the previous trial Maître Barboux acted for M. Charles de Lesseps. He urged that there was no proof of intention to corrupt anybody. He blamed political conditions for all that had taken place. "Politics devoured both men and millions. When a party was in power, it took the money which it needed to defend its ideas, and sometimes to enrich its supporters." Towards the close of an eloquent and moving address he passed a high eulogium upon Count Ferdinand and M. Charles de Lesseps. "He demanded, in conclusion, a verdict which should do justice to an honourable man, restore the fame of an illustrious name, and compensate the country for the prestige which she had lost in accusing one of her noblest children, and subjecting him to undeserved insult."

When Counsel for each of the defendants had spoken the prisoners were asked whether they had anything to

say before the jury considered their verdict. Charles de Lesseps then stood up and said: "You know why I entered into the Panama affair; it was only to follow my father. And if I have stood the tortures which I have undergone during these three months, if during the trial I have striven to preserve a semblance of calmness, it has been because I believed I was serving my father. I assure you that I have never deviated from the strictest honesty, the most thorough probity, and if I yielded to solicitations and pressure—put yourselves in my place. If you had had thousands of bondholders behind you, would you have hesitated to act as I did? I feel that what you ask of me in your consciences is to conceal nothing. Well, I have probed my conscience, and for the last time I assure you that I am certain that I have concealed nothing, omitted nothing. You have to judge a whole life of honour and industry."

M. Sans Leroy was the only other defendant to speak.

The jury were away two hours and a half. When they returned to the expectant and crowded Court-room, they brought in a verdict of guilty with extenuating circumstances in the case of Charles de Lesseps and M. Blondin, guilty without extenuating circumstances in the case of M. Baïhaut. The rest of the defendants were declared not guilty.

The judges then retired to consider what sentence should be passed on the condemned prisoners. After an hour and a half spent in deliberation they sentenced Charles de Lesseps to one year's imprisonment, to run concurrently with the sentence at the previous trial; M. Blondin received two years' imprisonment, while M.

Baihaut was given a sentence of five years' imprisonment, with a fine of 750,000 francs and loss of civil rights. All three defendants were jointly ordered to refund to the liquidator of the Panama Company the sum of 375,000 francs which had been paid out to M. Baihaut on account.

It is impossible not to sympathise deeply with Charles de Lesseps. That he was weak and dominated by big figures in the financial and political world must be granted. But it would seem that the whole business had got beyond his capacity. He had neither the ability nor the experience to cope with a crisis where the most delicate balance of judgment was required. Transparently honest himself, he yielded only to claims that what he was asked to do was usual and customary in such circumstances. His duty, as he saw it, was to safeguard the shareholders by keeping the undertaking going somehow: he did not realise that the means by which he hoped to do so were questionable. Added to this was his determination to protect his father from all worry and anxiety so dangerous to him at his advanced age. He had gone into the business against his better judgment, and only because his father had espoused the cause with enthusiasm, refusing all advice to keep clear of it.

Now, as he stood pale but collected in the anteroom reserved for accused persons, he had no bitterness in his heart against anyone. Indeed, his first action was heartily to congratulate M. Fontaine on his acquittal.

Mercifully, Ferdinand de Lesseps and his son were spared the utmost severities of the sentences passed upon them. When the appeal from the judgment of

the Court in the previous trial was heard by the Court of Cassation the plea was allowed that there had been a technical flaw in the legal process initiating the action. The prescribed time limit in such cases had passed, though this had not been allowed by the presiding judge at the trial. Accordingly, the sentences were quashed and all the defendants, not held on any other count, were ordered to be set at liberty.

This meant that Ferdinand de Lesseps was a free man, though Charles had to serve the one year's imprisonment to which he had been sentenced at the bribery trial.

The stigma and the dishonour remained, dishonour which overshadowed not only the lives of the principals and their families, but all France. The X-rays of truth had had to pierce through flesh and bone to reveal the cancerous growth in the depths of the body politic. Only pain and suffering, as the sharp knife of justice cut away the evil, could restore health and peace.

CHAPTER VI

DEATH OF DE LESSEPS

THE storm passed. The thunder and the lightning ceased. The mountainous waves died down, which so lately had threatened to sink the frail barque making its way slowly towards the west. The sun was setting, not in any blaze of glory, but screened still by clouds, which if they had lost the power to harm could still anticipate the coming night.

The great mind which had conceived plans of such grandeur and usefulness, which had been so quick in wit and firm in resolution, so catholic in vision and resourceful in execution, showed unmistakeably that it was nearing the end of its long activity. Only by the momentary gleam of the still living eyes, and the sudden grip of the hand at the coverlet, was there evidence that a soul still inhabited its tenement of clay. Of all the strife and stress of the preceding months there was merciful ignorance. Summer faded into autumn once, and yet again, until on December 7th, 1894, entering upon the nineteenth year of his pilgrimage the spirit of Ferdinand de Lesseps was allowed to pass peacefully away.

The majesty of death restored to the "Grand Frenchman" something of the lost majesty of his life. Men remembered not where he had failed, but where

he had succeeded. There was sincere pity that fate had so hardly used him in his declining years, and though it was not yet possible to free the remembrance of him from blame the yeast of rehabilitation began to work and to redeem.

A long and solemn *cortège* followed his remains to their last resting place at Père-Lachaise; but added sorrow was lent to the occasion by the absence of Charles de Lesseps, exiled in England after the terrible ordeal which had resulted from his filial loyalty and love.

Of all the tributes, and they were many, which testified to the achievements of the mighty dead, we like best that of one who knew him intimately and which comes nearest to the estimate of him which must be made by anyone studying closely his life and character.

"Simple in his tastes, never thinking of himself, constantly preoccupied about others, supremely kind, he did not and would not recognise such a thing as evil. Of a confiding nature, he was inclined to judge others by himself. This naturally affectionate abandonment that everyone felt in him had procured him profound attachments and devotions. He showed, while making the Suez Canal, what a gift he possessed for levying the pacific armies he conducted. He set duty above everything, had in the highest degree a reverence for honour, and placed his indomitable courage at the service of everything that was beneficial with an abnegation that nothing could tire. His marvellous physical and moral equilibrium gave him an evenness of temper which always rendered his society charming. Whatever his cares, his work, or his troubles, I have

never noticed in him aught but generous impulses and a love of humanity carried even to those heroic imprudences of which they alone are capable who devote themselves to the amelioration of humanity."

One thing only seems to be missing in this description, which touches and holds together all the rest—he was a real Peter Pan, a boy who refused to grow up. The adventurous spirit, the courage, the idealism, the love of fair play, which were his possession all through life, are the attributes and qualities of the fairest and most wholesome boyhood. So too are the happy conceitedness, the irresistible desire to crow, and the obliviousness to difficulties and obstacles which concern only the careful and worldly-wise adult. We can well believe that at the last that gallant brain was thinking Peter's very thoughts, it was saying, "To die will be an awfully big adventure."

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In 1897, three years later, on the thirtieth anniversary of the opening of the Suez Canal, the statue of Ferdinand de Lesseps was solemnly unveiled at its Mediterranean entrance. There it stands yet with the right arm extended, greeting all who would journey towards the colourful east, and invoking peace on the nations that border that azure mid-world sea.

CHAPTER VII

POSTSCRIPT TO PANAMA

THE French failure in Panama was not the end of the great Interoceanic Canal project. Indeed, failure is perhaps hardly the word to use in connection with a fine pioneering effort which paved the way for ultimate success. France was defeated at the time by inadequate machinery and by the almost complete breakdown of morale due to disease and climatic conditions which medical science had not then succeeded in overcoming. The extravagance and the recklessness was typical of a population working under plague-stricken conditions. Imagine the horrors of the Great Plague of London aggravated by equatorial heat, decaying vegetation, miasmic marshes, and venomous insect and reptilian life, and one may have some conception of the circumstances which nullified the French efforts, and created the financial crisis at home. How true were Gilbert's lines:

“ Beyond the Chagres River
 'Tis said (the story's told)
 Are paths that lead to mountains
 Of purest virgin gold;
 But 'tis my firm conviction
 What e'er the tales they tell,
 That beyond the Chagres River
 All paths lead straight to hell.”

But for the ruin of thousands of families and the

political scandal the French defeat would have gone down to history as an honourable and glorious venture. The Americans afterwards admitted that what the French engineers had done they had done well, and it was possible even to use part of the derelict machinery.

For years after the failure of the Canal Company, and while its successor the New Panama Canal Company, brought into existence through the instrumentality of the liquidator, was keeping alive the Columbian Concession and even excavating a further 12,000,000 cubic yards of material, the whole region presented the appearance of a battlefield. "From one side of the Isthmus to the other," writes F. J. Haskin, "stretched an almost unbroken train of gloomy spectres of the disappointed hopes of the French people. Here a half-mile string of engines and cars; there a long row of steam cranes; at this place a mass of non-descript machinery; and at that place a big dredge left high and dry on the banks of the mighty Chagres at its flood stage, all spoke to the visitor of the French defeat. Exposed to the ravages of 20 tropical summers, decay ran riot, and but for the scenes of life and industry being enacted by the Americans, one might have felt himself stalking amid the tombs of thousands of dead hopes."

Let it be remembered, however, that if Ferdinand de Lesseps, backed by France, had not sown in tears the United States would not have reaped in joy.

The Americans had always preferred the Nicaragua route to that through the Isthmus of Panama, and it was only after a prolonged political struggle that it was eventually determined to follow the line advocated

by De Lesseps and his engineers. And the factor that really decided the issue after the investigations of the American Isthmian Canal Commission of 1900 was an economic one, the possibility of purchasing the holdings and concession of the French Company for a knock-out price of \$40,000,000. So the very wreckage of French hopes proved to be the foundation on which the American triumph rested.

When the Americans commenced operations in 1904 they not only had the advantage of all the work which had been already done, but progress had been made in other directions which greatly facilitated their gigantic task. There was the enormous improvement in machinery which enabled them to employ huge steam shovels, drillers, and other aids, such as the Lidgerwood flat cars, of a capacity and usefulness never contemplated in the French works. But more important still were the discoveries of Major (afterwards Sir) Ronald Ross that malaria was carried by mosquitoes, which enabled the American doctors to demonstrate that Yellow Fever also was conveyed only by mosquitoes of the stegomyia variety, and thus to reduce mortality among the workmen. Without these assets and discoveries it is likely that the Americans too would have failed.

Even as it was it cost the Americans \$75,000,000 more to make the canal than had been expended by the French with all the graft and waste.

But in a gigantic undertaking of this kind, testing the powers of man to the utmost, it is not a question of bestowing praise here and blame there, or contrasting failure with success. Still less is it a question of com-

parison between the capacities and achievements of different races. Rather is it a matter for thankfulness and rejoicing that the mind of man could conceive, plan, and carry through against such odds, an enterprise dedicated to the service of civilisation. In the victory eventually won all who did their bit, down to the humblest negro and West Indian workman, deserve to share in the universal gratitude.

The Americans tackled the problem with characteristic efficiency and enthusiasm. They had to wait until 1904 really to get going, when the creation of the independent Republic of Panama had settled the political difficulties which had caused vexatious delays. There was also some uncertainty at first as to whether a canal on the level or one with locks would be the most satisfactory. The decision was finally given in favour of the latter.

The order went forth to "make the dirt fly." Virtually a military dictatorship was instituted so that the work might proceed with expedition under conditions of strict discipline. The dictator was Col. George W. Goethals, an Army engineer, who was made chairman of the Isthmian Commission and chief engineer in charge of the canal.

It was amazing to see the transformation that took place in a short while. After a terrible outbreak of yellow fever the most important thing was to make the Canal Zone safe for workmen. Once it had been discovered that the infection was carried by mosquitoes this became a comparatively simple matter. A constant stream of oil or carbolic solution was fed into every rivulet which constituted a breeding ground for

the insects, while men with tanks on their backs went about spraying the stagnant pools and marshes. "The sanitarians at Panama," says Haskin, "gave to the workers there a sense of security that contributed no little to the spirit of determination so universally remarked and commended by visitors to the Zone during the era of construction. While there was no immunity from sickness and death, yet there was no panic, no constant dread, such as destroyed the morale of the French force. The Isthmus of Panama still remained hot, its inhabitants still were forced to take the precautions that aliens must take in the Tropics; but they were inspired with a confidence that if these precautions were taken they would not be in any greater danger than if they had remained in their northern homes. Pestilence, the scourge of the on-sweeping epidemic, the plague of swift death that is only a little worse than the panic of fear it inspires—this was the thing that was stamped out."

On the other hand clubs and competitions kept the workmen in good spirits and encouraged a healthy rivalry. "Not only were the Americans determined that the money voted for the canal should be honestly and economically expended, but they were determined, also, that the workers on the canal should be well paid and well cared for. To this end they paid not only higher wages than were current at home for the same work, but they effectively shielded the workers from the extactions and extortions of Latin and Oriental merchants by establishing a commissary through which the employees were furnished with wholesome food at reasonable prices—prices lower, indeed, than those

prevailing at home. As a result of these things the spirit of the Americans on the Canal Zone, from the chairman and chief engineer down to the actual diggers, was that of a determination to lay the barrier low, and to complete the job well within the limit of time and at the lowest possible cost." How De Lesseps would have rejoiced in this care for the labourer.

It is impossible here to write in detail of the tremendous engineering achievements, the "man-made canyon" of the Culebra Cut where over a hundred million cubic yards of material had to be excavated and removed, the building of the great Gatun Dam to control the torrential floods of the Chagres River, a dam containing nearly 30,000,000 tons of material and covering 288 acres, the twelve huge locks, six at each end of the Gatun Lake, which lift and let down vessels by a threefold stairway from ocean level to a height above the sea of 85 feet. The epic of Panama has been often told, and will always remain as one of the greatest human triumphs. Now the fifty-mile passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific can be made in six short hours.

From the time that the Americans set to work the making of the canal occupied ten years and three months. It was officially opened in 1914 and by 1915 the shipping of the seven seas was free to make use of the new route from east to west. It is saddening to remember that at this date the nations were locked in bloody conflict, intent on destruction, and in the trenches of France and Flanders were fighting and dying the sons and sons-in-law of Ferdinand de Lesseps, the man of vision, the creator of Suez and the inspirer of Panama, the man who sought peace and pursued it.

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